

Report shows more than half of mental health care visits conducted via video-based telemedicine

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Credit: Tima Miroshnichenko from Pexels

An analysis of clinical outpatient data found that telemedicine rates remain high following the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than half of

mental health care visits being conducted remotely via video conferencing.

While rates of telephone-based care have decreased to pre-pandemic levels, video-based visits have maintained a 2,300% increase compared with pre-pandemic levels. A brief research report is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The rapid uptake of telemedicine in the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic is well documented, yet there is little published literature on the redistribution of in-person and telemedicine encounters as U.S. health care systems enter a post-pandemic phase.

Researchers from the Veterans Affairs Health Care System analyzed data from the VA's Corporate Data Warehouse to describe trends for more than 200,000 patient encounters between January 2019 and August 2023. They found that telephone- and video-based care decreased from a peak of 79% of care in April 2020 to 36% in April 2023.

This decrease was caused by fewer telephone-based encounters. Video-based encounters have continued to make up 11% to 12% of all clinical care encounters. As of August 2023, video-based encounters accounted for 34% of [mental health](#), 3.7% of subspecialty, and 3.5% of primary care encounters, and telephone encounters accounted for 20.3%, 34.8%, and 16.7%, respectively.

According to the authors, these trends may obscure disparities in access to and use of telemedicine that disproportionately affect [older adults](#), individuals in rural regions, and patients from historically marginalized groups. They advise that future research should consider evaluating quality, safety, and [health](#) outcomes of [telemedicine](#) in this new equilibrium.

More information: *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2024).
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