

High telehealth use tied to increased health care utilization, cost

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Higher telehealth use in a hospital service area is tied to increased health care utilization and cost, [according to a study](#) published online May 13 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Morteza Saharkhiz, Ph.D., from Meta Platforms Inc. in Menlo Park, California, and colleagues evaluated the association between [telehealth](#)

use and outcomes for all Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries. The analysis included 3,436 hospital service areas for approximately 30 million Medicare beneficiaries.

The researchers found that compared with areas with low telehealth use, those living in high-use areas had more [ambulatory care](#)-sensitive hospitalizations (1.63 additional hospitalizations per 1,000 beneficiaries), more clinician encounters (0.30 additional encounters per beneficiary per semester), and higher total cost of care (\$164.99 higher cost per beneficiary per semester). The groups did not significantly differ for ambulatory care-sensitive emergency department visits.

"Data from the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that higher levels of telehealth use may be associated with increased access to care and potentially lower quality of care (evidenced by increases in ambulatory care-sensitive hospitalizations)," the authors write. "Replication of this analysis with post-COVID-19 data is needed to fully understand the impacts of the telehealth expansion."

More information: Morteza Saharkhiz et al, Telehealth Expansion and Medicare Beneficiaries' Care Quality and Access, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.11006](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.11006)

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