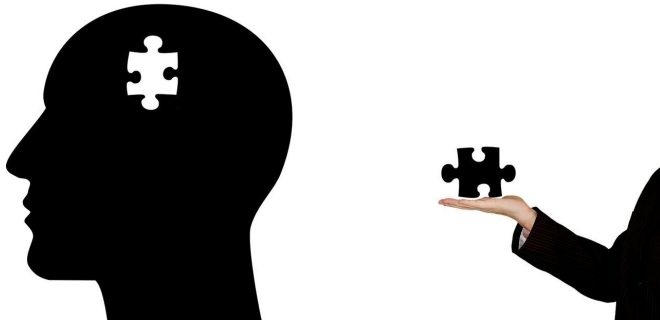


Providing veterans with video-enabled tablets leads to improved mental health care access

7 August 2019, by Erin Connors



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A Veterans Health Administration (VHA) program that provides tablets to veterans with mental disorders leads to improved access and continuity of care. A new study published online in *Psychiatric Services* in Advance finds that video-enabled tablets can improve mental health care access for patients who experience barriers because of geographic, social, or health-related circumstances.

About a third of the about 9 million veterans enrolled in VHA live in rural or island areas, and many have transportation or financial challenges to getting care. In addition, veterans with [mental disorders](#) may avoid care because of stigma or privacy concerns.

The VHA began distributing video-enabled tablets to veterans with mental disorders and barriers to accessing care in 2016. The researchers, led by Josephine C. Jacobs, Ph.D., with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Health Economics Resource Center in Menlo Park, California, looked at more than 700 [tablet](#) recipients and more than

1,000 individuals in a [control group](#) to evaluate the implementation of this initiative. The age distribution of the tablet recipients was similar to that of VHA users overall and the average age was 59. They looked at 6-month pre-post changes in number of psychotherapy and medication management visits, continuity of psychotherapy based on VHA's quality metric, and the proportion of mental health appointments that were missed or canceled.

The veterans who received the tablets had increased psychotherapy visits and medication management encounters compared to the matched control group. The tablet recipients were significantly more likely than control group participants to meet VHA's [continuity-of-care](#) measure for psychotherapy (20.6% versus 2.6%). Those receiving a tablet also had a lower rate of missed or canceled appointments compared with the matched control group. The study also looked at the number of emergency department or urgent care visits and found no significant differences between the two groups.

The authors conclude that "VA's telehealth tablet initiative successfully improved access to [mental health services](#) for veterans with access barriers and may serve as a model for other large, integrated health care systems aiming to address access barriers."

More information: Josephine C. Jacobs et al. Increasing Mental Health Care Access, Continuity, and Efficiency for Veterans Through Telehealth With Video Tablets, *Psychiatric Services* (2019). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ps.201900104](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201900104)

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