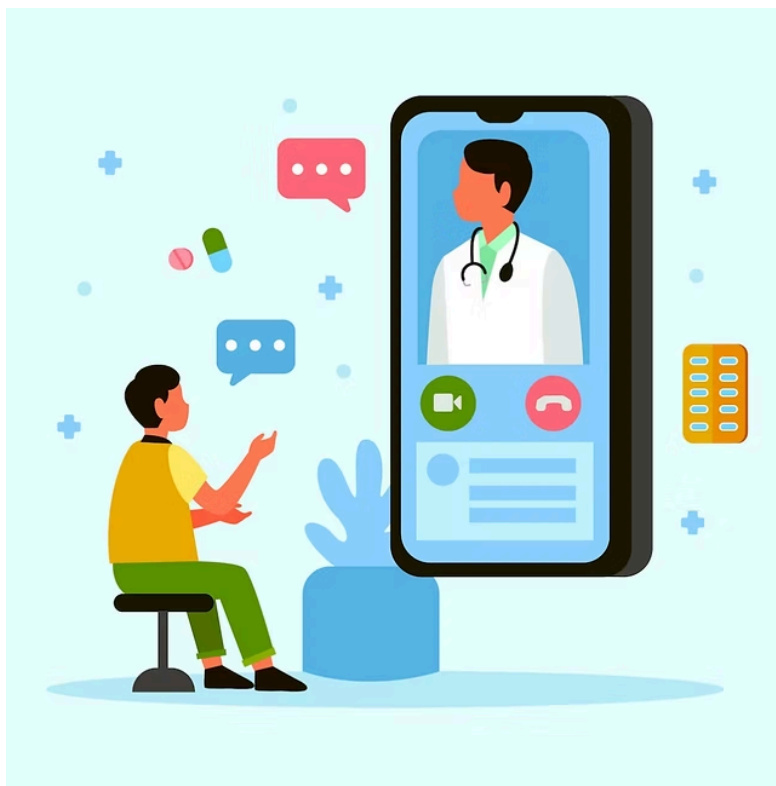




THE CURRENT STATE OF TELEHEALTH

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Source: Freepik

Telehealth is the delivery of healthcare services through digital means, allowing for remote diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of patients. The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily accelerated the use of telehealth in the United States, and the rest of the world, with its usage increasing by over 38 times since the beginning according to a report by McKinsey & Company. Because of this surge in demand, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded coverage for telehealth services in 2022 by investing in telehealth infrastructure in regions across America, making it easier for patients to access care from their homes. Even private insurers have also followed suit, making telehealth more accessible than ever before.

Telehealth has numerous benefits, including improved access to care and affordability. Patients can connect with healthcare providers from their own homes, saving time and money on transportation, which is crucial for patients living in rural areas. It has also been shown to improve health outcomes, as patients are more likely to follow through with their treatment when they can easily communicate with their care provider. Additionally, the expansion of coverage for telehealth services by CMS and private insurers has made it more affordable for patients to receive care.

In fact, a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 83% of patients who used telehealth were satisfied with their experience, higher than the satisfaction rate of traditional in-person visits.

However, there are still challenges to the accessibility of telehealth, such as the digital divide and lack of standardized regulations across states. In response, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the Emergency Connectivity Fund in 2022, which provides funding to underserved areas to increase access to internet infrastructure and connectivity. This initiative has helped improve access to technology for many people in rural parts of the United States, allowing them the opportunity to utilize telehealth services.

Moreover, the lack of standardized regulations for telehealth services across states can create confusion for patients and healthcare providers. However, in 2023, the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (IMLC) was launched to help streamline the licensing process for healthcare providers who practice telehealth across state lines. The IMLC aims to address these challenges by providing a streamlined process for healthcare providers to obtain licenses to practice in multiple states. Under the IMLC, healthcare providers who meet certain eligibility criteria can apply for a "Letter of Qualification" that allows them to practice medicine in any state that is part of the compact. This initiative has helped improve access to care for patients who live in areas where healthcare providers are in short supply, so that they can digitally meet with dedicated providers physically outside their area.

The accessibility of telehealth has advanced rapidly in 2022 and 2023, thanks to increased investment in telehealth infrastructure and expanded coverage by insurance providers. While challenges to accessibility still exist, initiatives like the Emergency Connectivity Fund and the IMLC are helping to improve access to care for patients across the United States. As the use of telehealth continues to grow, it is important for healthcare providers and policymakers to continue investing in this technology to ensure all patients have access to high-quality care.