



NATIONAL HEALTH COUNCIL

Telemedicine that Meets Patient Needs: Leveraging Patient Insights

Telemedicine is the exchange of medical information from one site to another through electronic communication to improve a patient's health.

What are patients and patient advocates saying about telemedicine?

To learn about chronic disease patient experiences with telemedicine, the National Health Council (NHC) staff conducted eight 30-minute listening sessions with patient organizations. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed by two independent researchers. Qualitative interview data was thematically analyzed using short sentences and phrases.

Most patients enjoy the convenience of telemedicine. But, telemedicine does not work for everyone. It has the potential to reduce OR perpetuate health disparities, based on how it is implemented. Patients, in consultation with their providers, are best positioned to determine whether a virtual, audio-only, or in-person visit is the right fit. As they consider which visit mode is most appropriate, the following factors should be considered:

Patients want telehealth technology that...



Is designed and tested with diverse patients



Allows care partners to join



Supports multiple languages



Is accessible without a computer via telephone

Considerations for Improved Telemedicine Experience

Disease characteristics, including signs and symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telemedicine may not work in instances where a visible sign is located in a body area the patient does not want to expose to a camera. • Individuals at risk for infection (e.g., compromised immune system) may prefer telemedicine over in-office visits to reduce exposure.
Diagnosis or disease stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For some illnesses, it may be difficult for individuals to get a diagnosis and/or begin or adjust treatment via telemedicine alone.
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with mobility barriers (due to health or disability and/or transportation issues) may prefer telemedicine.
Access to private space at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals may or may not have the desired level of privacy at home for conducting the appointment.
Access to internet and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband coverage is spotty and expensive in many locations. • Cell phone ownership does not also mean individuals have a data plan to access virtual visits or instructions for using telemedicine.
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telemedicine can provide opportunity for individuals to access specialists across the country and may expedite access to care.