

Health E-Stat 120: Telemedicine Use Among Office-based Physicians in 2021 and 2024

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Between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of U.S. office-based physicians who used telemedicine increased from 15.4% to 85.9% (1). Research in ambulatory health care settings shows that, since this time, the use of telemedicine has decreased (2). However, its use remains important to health care delivery (3). This report uses data from the 2021 and 2024 National Electronic Health Records Survey (NEHRS), conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), to examine differences in telemedicine use among office-based physicians by selected characteristics.

Telemedicine use among office-based physicians was lower in 2024 (80.0%) than in 2021 (86.5%) (Table). Telemedicine use decreased 5.7% among primary care physicians from 2021 (91.4%) to 2024 (86.2%) and 19.7% among surgical specialists during the same period (74.8% to 60.1%). No significant difference in telemedicine use was seen in 2021 and 2024 for physicians with a medical specialty.

Telemedicine use decreased 6.6% in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) from 2021 (86.7%) to 2024 (81.0%) and 26.9% in non-MSAs during the same period (83.3% to 60.9%). Telemedicine use also decreased in practices with two or more physicians, practices owned by a physician or physician group, and practices with other ownership types. Telemedicine use also declined between 2021 and 2024 among physicians who treated patients with Medicaid, treated patients with and without Medicare, or used a certified electronic health record (EHR) system.

Data source and methods

Data are from 2021 and 2024 NEHRS restricted data files. Public use versions are available (4,5). Response rates for the 2021 and 2024 NEHRS are 46.6% and 47.4%, respectively, calculated according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Response Rate 3 (6). NEHRS collects data from U.S. physicians. Results are based upon nationally representative weighted estimates of 1,875 office-based physicians in 2021 and 1,460 office-based physicians in 2024. The 2024 NEHRS included physicians practicing in non-office settings. For comparability, these physicians were omitted. Statistical differences between 2021 and 2024 are based on two-



tailed significance tests ($p < 0.05$) and, unless otherwise noted, meet NCHS' reliability standards (7).

Telemedicine use was based on a yes response to the question, “Does your practice use telemedicine technology (e.g., audio, audio with video, web videoconference) for patient visits?” Prior research (1) used the “audio with video and web videoconference” definition. Primary care specialties included general or family practice, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology (primary care subspecialties), and pediatrics. Surgical specialties included general surgery, obstetrics and gynecology (surgical subspecialties), ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, otolaryngology, urology, and other. Medical specialties included cardiovascular diseases, dermatology, neurology, psychiatry, and other. “Other” practice ownership included insurance company health plan or HMO, community health center, medical or academic health center, other hospital, other health care corporation, or some other entity ownership. A certified EHR system met the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requirements necessary to meet the objectives of the Medicare Promoting Interoperability Program (8).

References

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Suggested citation

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Table. Percentage of office-based physicians who use telemedicine, by selected physician and practice characteristics: United States, 2021 and 2024

Characteristic	2021		2024	
	Percent (95% confidence interval)	Standard error	Percent (95% confidence interval)	Standard error
All physicians*	86.5 (83.7–89.0)	1.3	80.0 (77.7–82.2)	1.1
Specialty				
Primary care*	91.4 (88.0–94.2)	1.5	86.2 (82.6–89.3)	1.7
Surgical*	74.8 (67.5–81.2)	3.4	60.1 (55.6–64.6)	2.2
Medical	87.2 (81.1–91.8)	2.6	83.2 (78.7–87.0)	2.0
Metropolitan statistical area (MSA)				
MSA*	86.7 (83.7–89.4)	1.4	81.0 (78.6–83.2)	1.1
Non-MSA*	83.3 (74.9–89.9)	3.6	60.9 (47.8–72.9)	6.1
Number of physicians at practice				
1 (solo practice)	76.3 (69.2–82.4)	3.2	70.6 (64.6–76.2)	2.9
2–10*	86.8 (82.6–90.4)	1.9	78.7 (75.2–81.9)	1.7
11 or more*	96.8 (93.9–98.6)	1.1	89.6 (85.9–92.5)	1.6
Practice ownership				
Physician or physician group*	80.2 (75.9–84.1)	2.0	74.0 (70.6–77.2)	1.7
Other*	96.6 (94.6–98.1)	0.8	87.9 (84.8–90.7)	1.5
Treat patients insured with Medicaid				
Yes*	88.1 (84.9–90.8)	1.5	80.7 (78.0–83.1)	1.3
No	81.4 (74.4–87.2)	3.1	76.3 (70.5–81.5)	2.7
Treat patients insured with Medicare				
Yes*	86.2 (82.9–89.0)	1.5	80.3 (77.8–82.7)	1.2
No*	88.7 (82.4–93.3)	2.6	77.2 (70.1–83.3)	3.3
Uses a certified electronic health record system†				
Yes*	88.8 (85.9–91.3)	1.3	81.5 (79.0–83.7)	1.2

* Significant difference between 2021 and 2024 ($p < 0.05$).

† Percentages of telemedicine use among physicians who do not use a certified electronic health record system are not presented, because they do not meet National Center for Health Statistics standards for reliability.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Electronic Health Records Survey, 2021 and 2024.