



Telehealth in an Increasingly Virtual World

Recent technological advances, questions of equity and the spread of the coronavirus have intensified the conversation on how to increase access to healthcare. Children face even more barriers than adults when it comes to obtaining mental health care, especially in rural, marginalized and low-socioeconomic-status communities.

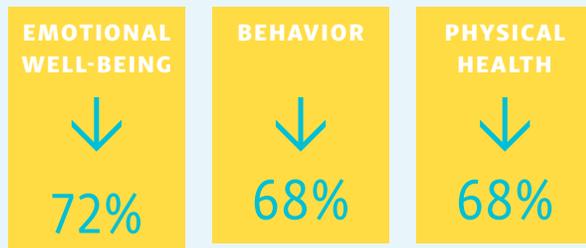
During the coronavirus lockdowns in 2020, the medical community sprang into action and implemented telehealth broadly across disciplines. At the same time, temporary emergency measures adopted by government agencies and insurance companies reduced barriers to telehealth.

A new Child Mind Institute/Ipsos poll indicates that telehealth has been a popular option for parents seeking mental health support for their children during the pandemic. (The poll was conducted in September 2020 with a representative sample of 351 American parents who have recently used/sought out mental health treatment for their child. You can access the full results at www.ipsos.com/en-us/parents-children-telehealth) Among the findings:

- **DECLINING WELL-BEING:** More than two thirds of parents who sought help said they had witnessed a decline in their child's emotional well-being (72%), behavior (68%), and physical health due to decreased activities/exercise (68%).
- **ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE MOST COMMON:** Anxiety (40%) and depression (37%) are the most common mental health challenges leading parents to seek telehealth services for their child. Seeking help for problem behavior (30%), ADHD (30%) or learning challenges (23%) was also common.
- **A VARIETY OF TREATMENTS:** Talk therapy (49%) is the most common service parents have accessed or sought out through telehealth for their child, though a third of parents who have used/tried to use telehealth since the start of the pandemic also report accessing/seeking out psychiatric medication consultation (32%) and/or cognitive behavioral therapy (31%).

Declining well-being

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Parents express satisfaction with telehealth treatment for children

Parents in the survey who have used telehealth services for children report strongly positive responses. 85% said their child had benefited, 84% said it had been a positive experience for their child, 78% said they had seen significant improvement in their child, and 87% said they would recommend it to others.

- Telehealth users plan to stick with it: Among parents who have used telehealth services since the start of the pandemic, 83% say they are likely to continue using these services during the pandemic — and 78% say that they are likely to continue using telehealth services *after* the coronavirus pandemic ends.

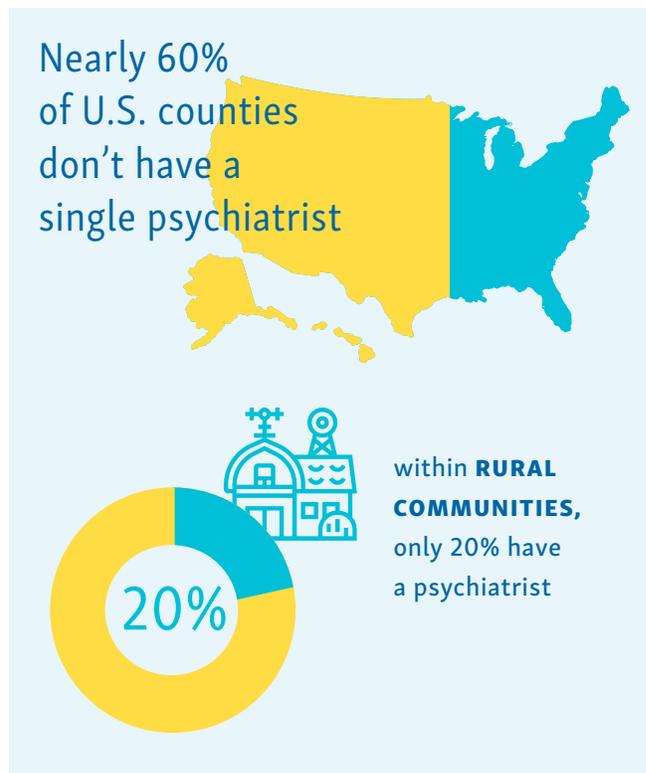
Providers also express satisfaction with telehealth

In another recent survey, 57% of providers view telehealth more favorably than before the coronavirus and 64% report that they are now more comfortable using it.

- The majority of behavioral and primary care providers (93% and 62% respectively) predict that they will continue to conduct more telehealth visits after the pandemic.
- In another survey conducted during the pandemic, 76% of practitioners in behavioral and mental health report that they are satisfied with telehealth. Within that group, 84% of psychiatrists, 74% of clinical psychologists/social workers/therapists, and 70% of alcohol/drug addiction managers report being content with the modality.

Why telehealth?

- Nearly 60% of U.S. counties don't have a single psychiatrist; within rural communities, only 20% have a psychiatrist. And there are even fewer child and adolescent psychiatrists — about 8,300, compared with over 17 million kids in need. Partly due to this shortage, children sometimes wait up to a decade between the onset of mental health symptoms and the start of treatment.



- Because of this shortage of behavioral health practitioners, primary care physicians provide the bulk of mental health care and psychopharmacological prescriptions — despite their lack of specialist training on evidence-based behavioral treatments. Both primary care physicians and their patients can benefit from the input of a psychiatrist, which can be provided via telehealth — either as a one-time consultation or for ongoing care.

Bridging the Gap

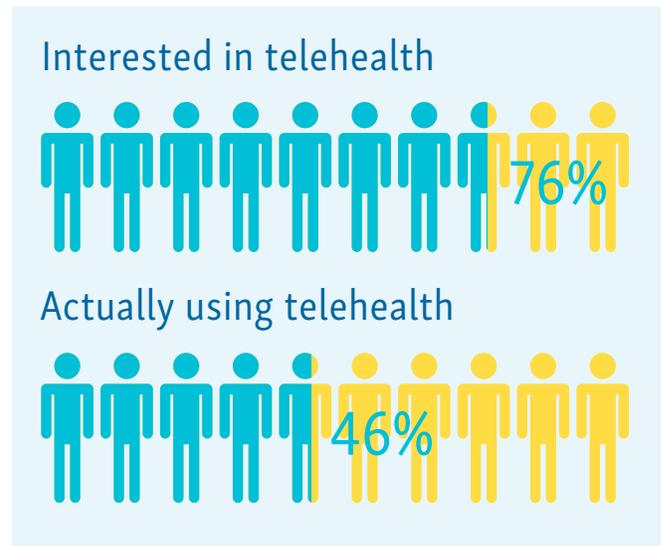
Telehealth holds particular promise for children in marginalized, rural, low-income or high-risk groups and communities, all of whom have particularly limited access to traditional healthcare:

- Telehealth solves problems of transportation and scheduling that commonly get in the way of accessing in-person mental health treatment.
- Telehealth can make it easier to overcome cultural stigma around mental health treatment.
- Telehealth can speed up diagnosis and treatment by connecting individuals with available providers in different areas.
- Telehealth has been shown to be effective in removing barriers and providing effective, quality care to youth of color who typically have less access to care.
- Telehealth can make care more accessible to the nearly 2 million youth who experience homelessness every year in the U.S.

Challenges and Next Steps

Telehealth has the potential to expand access to quality care, benefitting countless kids. But it's not a cure-all. Here are some of the challenges:

- On the patient side, a coronavirus-era McKinsey survey found that while 76% of consumers say they are interested in telehealth, only 46% are actually using it. The biggest reasons for this gap include lack of awareness about telehealth offerings and confusion over insurance.



- In order for telemental health to truly remove barriers to access, we as a country need to address underlying issues of equity in our society, including racial bias, income disparities and lack of equal access to high-speed internet.
- We also need more trained mental health professionals because telehealth can only go so far without enough providers.
- We need clear laws and insurance regulations that make telehealth a viable choice for patients and practitioners alike. Now is the time to put pressure on legislators to keep telehealth coverage practicable.

[READ THE FULL 2020 CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH REPORT AT CHILDMIND.ORG/2020REPORT](https://www.childmind.org/2020report)

The Child Mind Institute is an independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders. Our teams work every day to deliver the highest standards of care, advance the science of the developing brain and empower parents, professionals and policymakers to support children when and where they need it most.