

Telehealth Research Recap: HIV



Telehealth for HIV Care

Telehealth can be used to support access to care for people with HIV (PWH). An analysis of telehealth use by PWH during the COVID-19 pandemic found an even divide between those opting for care delivered in-person or through telehealth.¹ Adults aged 46-60 were the highest telehealth users compared to all other age groups (Figure 1).² Preference for telehealth modality also varied across age groups, with older patients showing a preference for audio-only telehealth (Figure 1).³ A program focused on pediatric and adolescent PWH found that more than two-thirds of patients used telehealth to access treatment.⁴ While telehealth can be used for some aspects of HIV care, procedures such as lab testing cannot be delivered virtually.⁵ It is important to offer patients a variety of telehealth modalities and in-person care as appropriate.

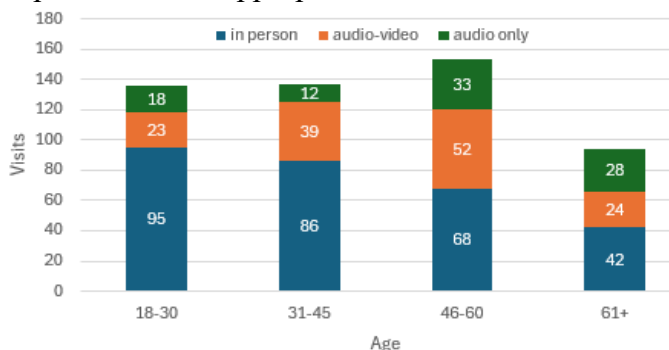


Figure 1. Number of Visits at Ryan White HIV Clinics by Age and Modality at Ryan White Clinics⁶

Telehealth Use for PrEP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is effective in preventing new HIV infections.⁷ A systematic review found that the use of telehealth for PrEP services increased significantly between 2020 and 2022.⁸ Many people report feeling uncomfortable going to a clinic for ongoing PrEP treatment.⁹ In one pilot study, one in three participants reported that they would not have sought PrEP services if

telehealth wasn't an option.¹⁰ Several different models have been developed to support the delivery of PrEP through telehealth, including text messaging, internet, and smartphone applications.¹¹

Expanding Access to Behavioral Health Care

Behavioral health needs can impact HIV care by reducing adherence to treatment.¹² One study assessed the availability of behavioral health screening and interventions through telehealth for people with HIV.¹³ Most respondents reported that part of their online visit included a screening for mental health disorders.¹⁴ Another study found that patients significantly preferred counseling via telehealth instead of in-person.¹⁵ There were similar appointment attendance rates, antiretroviral adherence, and viral load between the telehealth and in-person groups.¹⁶ These findings indicate that telehealth can be effectively used to support the behavioral health needs of people with HIV.

Variation in Types of Telehealth Treatment

There are a variety of telehealth uses to support PWH. Sending text messages about HIV testing and prevention increased the number of patients engaging in discussions about and testing for HIV.¹⁷ Smartphone applications have increased engagement in treatment and reduced discontinuation of PrEP.¹⁸ Mobile health apps can facilitate treatment for people with HIV, including those from minority communities.¹⁹ Chatbots have been used to facilitate access to PrEP treatment.²⁰ Social media can be used to share messages about HIV screening.²¹ Providers participating in telementoring successfully reduced viral load rates among patients.²² These diverse approaches feature the innovative ways to use telehealth to increase access to diagnosis, prevention, testing, and treatment for HIV.

Resources

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