

Telehealth Research Recap: Maternal Health



Telehealth Use for Maternal Health

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed telehealth's rapid expansion and adoption in maternal health care.¹ Health care professionals can use virtual consultations to monitor maternal and fetal health, provide guidance, and support mental well-being.^{2,3} Several studies depicted the distribution of telehealth across various maternal health services, highlighting a substantial rise in virtual care for hypertension, gestational diabetes, and behavioral health.^{4,5,6,7,8} While telehealth can be used for some maternal health visits, in-person visits are required for certain health care services, such as ultrasounds and lab tests.⁹ Figure 1 illustrates the increased use of prenatal telehealth visits for pregnant people.¹⁰

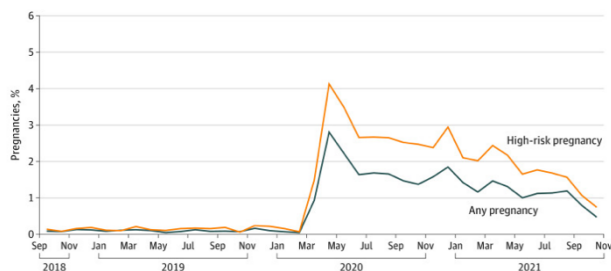


Figure 1. Percentage of Pregnancies Using Telehealth for Prenatal Care¹¹

Telehealth in Prenatal, Antenatal, and Postpartum Care

Implementing telehealth in prenatal, antenatal, and postpartum care has been significant. Remote monitoring of vitals via telehealth platforms led to better management of hypertension in postpartum patient.¹² Additionally, the use of telehealth for postpartum hypertension resulted in reduced readmissions.¹³ There is also high patient satisfaction with prenatal and antenatal visits facilitated through telehealth.^{14,15} A systematic review of the literature shows that providers perceive that telehealth may improve patient's access to care, continuity of care, and appointment attendance.¹⁶ These key findings underscore telehealth's transformative impact on maternal health care.

Telehealth for Maternal Behavioral Health

Recent publications have illuminated the use and effectiveness of telehealth in enhancing care for pregnant and post-partum people grappling with substance use disorders and mental health challenges.^{17,18} During the COVID-19 pandemic, a health system identified an increased frequency of online and text-message-based screening for mothers with behavioral health needs.¹⁹ A study of postpartum depressive patients showed significant improvements between pre- and postintervention scores for depression symptoms.²⁰ Another study on perinatal behavioral health disorders demonstrated that telephone-based screening and referrals may improve rates of screening, identification, and treatment attendance.²¹ A significant number of pregnant people with opioid use disorder who received treatment through telehealth received continuous care throughout their pregnancy.²² These findings affirm the pivotal role telehealth has played in advancing maternal behavioral health care.

Quality of Care in Telehealth for Maternal Health

Studies investigating the quality of maternal health services delivered via telehealth support its potential. Remote patient monitoring for postpartum hypertension was associated with reduced hospital readmissions compared to standard care.²³ Current research has found that telehealth services had high patient satisfaction, including for behavioral health screening and referral.²⁴ Another study showed that telehealth was particularly effective in rural settings, improving prenatal care access and reducing health disparities.²⁵ Moreover, feedback from providers highlights the potential of telehealth for provider-to-provider consultations.²⁶ These studies suggest that telehealth is a viable alternative to traditional care models, offering quality maternal health services that are accessible and adaptable to patient needs.

Resources

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