The benefits of and barriers to engagement with telehealth for the disability community

Rupa S. Valdez, Ph.D.

University of Virginia Department of Public Health Sciences & Department of Engineering Systems and Environment

The disability community is a health disparity population

- Over 75% of individuals with disabilities report experiencing barriers that impede them from using healthcare and wellness services[1]

- Only 40.7% of physicians report feeling "very confident" in their ability to provide the same quality of care[2]

- Adults living with disabilities are 3 times more likely to have chronic health conditions[3]

- 31% of people with disabilities report fair or poor health in comparison to 6% of the general population[3]

Legal imperative

- Persons with disabilities must have equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973)

- Persons with disabilities must have full and equal access to both private and public health care services and facilities (Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act)

- All programs delivered by covered entities through electronic and information technology must be accessible (Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act)
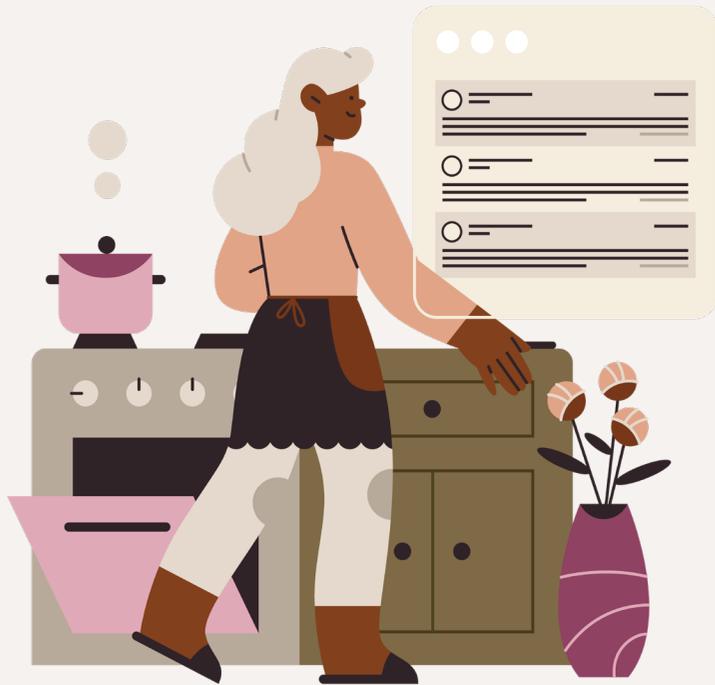
Over one-third of physicians claim to know little to nothing about their responsibilities under the ADA.[4]

Potential benefits of telehealth

- Reduced patient work[5]

- Avoidance of inaccessible clinical spaces[6]

- Improved health care access and quality[7]

The widespread use of telehealth could further exacerbate inequities faced by people with disabilities.

Design considerations

- Compliance with existing standards and best practices[8]

- Responsiveness to individual needs

- Compatibility with existing technology

Implementation considerations

- Expanding broadband access[9]

- Providing access to accessible technologies[10]

- Training patients and providers

- Ensuring necessary personnel and services

Policy considerations

- Develop and enforce standards for web accessibility[11]

- Monitor health and patient-centered outcomes by disability type

- Reinstate regulations for cyber security designations[12]

Our approach to telehealth must include the needs of people with disabilities across considerations for design, implementation, and policy.[13]

References

1. Disability and Health | Healthy People 2020 [Internet]. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. [cited 2022 Jan 27]. Available from: https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics- objectives/topic/disability-and-health/national-snapshot

2. Iezzoni LI, Rao SR, Ressalam J, Bolcic-Jankovic D, Agaronnik ND, Donelan K, et al. Physicians' Perceptions Of People With Disability And Their Health Care. Health Affairs. 2021 Feb 1;40(2):297–306.

3. CDC. Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic | CDC [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019 [cited 2022 Jan 27]. Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html

4. Iezzoni LI, Rao SR, Ressalam J, Bolcic-Jankovic D, Agaronnik ND, Lagu T, et al. US Physicians' Knowledge About The Americans With Disabilities Act And Accommodation Of Patients With Disability. Health Aff (Millwood). 2022 Jan;41(1):96–104.

5. Holden RJ, Valdez RS. The Patient Factor: Theories and Methods for Patient Ergonomics. CRC Press; 2021.

6. Pharr JR , James T , Yeung Y-L. Accessibility and accommodations for patients with mobility disabilities in a large healthcare system: how are we doing? Disabil Health J 2019; 12 (4): 679–84.

7. Zhou L , Parmanto B. Reaching people with disabilities in underserved areas through digital interventions: systematic review. J Med Internet Res 2019; 21 (10): e12981.

8.W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2 Level AAA Conformance. https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG2AAA-Conformance Accessed October 29, 2020

9. Anderson M, Perrin A. Disabled Americans less likely to use technology. Pew Research Center. 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/07/disabled-americans-are-less-likely-to-use-technology/ Accessed October 29, 2020

10. National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers. Building Accessible Telehealth for Patients with Disabilities from the Ground Up. 2020. Webinar. https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/event/nctrc-telehealth-hack-building-accessible-telehealth-for-patients-with-disabilities-from-the-ground-up/ Accessed December 9, 2020.

11. Annaswamy TM , Verduzco-Gutierrez M , Frieden L. Telemedicine barriers and challenges for persons with disabilities: Covid-19 and beyond. Disabil Health 2020. doi: 10.1016/j.dhjo.2020.100973

12. Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services. Notification of enforcement discretion for telehealth remote communications during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency. 2020. https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/notification-enforcement-discretion-telehealth/index.html Accessed October 2, 2020

13. Valdez, R.S., Rogers, C.C., Claypool, H., Trieshmann, L., Frye, O., Wellbeloved-Stone, C., Kushalnagar, P. Ensuring full participation of people with disabilies in an era of telehealth. Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association 2020.