

HealthLeaders

PANDEMIC PUSHES CALIFORNIANS TO EMBRACE TELEHEALTH

ANALYSIS | BY **JOHN COMMINS** | MAY 04, 2021

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The survey also found that telehealth eliminates vehicle trips and reduces waiting times and time away from work.**
- **However, those benefits are not shared equally, owing largely to income, educational levels, and a lack of access to broadband in remote areas and underserved communities of color.**
- **More than half of Hispanics (56%) said they didn't use telehealth, compared with 44% of non-Hispanics.**
- **One-third (34%) of White respondents said they didn't use telehealth, as did 44% of Black respondents, and 54% of Asians.**
- **Among Hispanics, 56% report no use of telehealth compared to 44% of non-Hispanics, likely reflecting both their lack of access to health care and internet.**

Slightly more than half (51%) of Californians went virtual for their healthcare during the pandemic, using either a telephone, smartphone or computer, a new survey finds.

And those new habits will likely continue when the coronavirus pandemic wanes and the public health emergency is lifted, according to the survey from the University of Southern California.

The survey of 1,650 Californians also found that 55% of workers with access to broadband have been working from home full- or part-time.

"The hesitancy towards remote work, learning and telehealth was swept away by necessity during the pandemic," said study lead researcher Hernán Galperin, an associate professor at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

"Now we're seeing a seismic shift in the way people want to work, learn and manage health visits among those who have broadband access. Those changes give us a real opportunity to cut congestion and carbon emissions," Galperin said.

The survey found that the key to accessing telehealth was the ability to access broadband, said Sunne Wright McPeak, president and CEO of the California Emerging Technology.

"These findings call out the need for strategic broadband investments by government leaders, transportation planners and health systems to help close the digital divide, returning triple bottom-line dividends for the economy, environment and equity," McPeak said.

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Among Hispanics, 56% report no use of telehealth compared to 44% of non-Hispanics, likely reflecting both their lack of access to health care and internet. The first survey released in March reported that low-income households, and particularly low-income Spanish-speaking households, were more likely to have no or limited home internet access.

"Telehealth access is a vital component of broadband access and equity," said Dorian Traube, associate professor at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, and a contributor to the survey.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic opened new access points for patients, disparities still exist in access related to essential social determinants of health, including race and place of residence. Closing the digital divide holds promise for increasing health equity," she said.

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Within California, the Bay Area has the highest telehealth engagement in California, with 58% of respondents from the area reporting that they used telehealth, followed by Inland Empire, Orange and San Diego counties and the Central Valley.

Los Angeles County had the lowest level of telehealth participation at 46%.

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John Commins is a content specialist and online news editor for HealthLeaders, a Simplify Compliance brand.