



# What Is Telehealth?

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Providers have used telehealth for decades but only in the last few years has its use accelerated. **Telehealth** uses technology to deliver health care and other health-related services remotely, including care coordination between providers and patients. In many cases it can create efficiencies, extend the reach of the provider and expand the pool of available providers, including specialists, without increasing the size of the provider workforce. Telehealth is not a service itself but rather a different way to deliver health care services.

## The 3 Types of Telehealth:

1. **Real-time communication** allows patients to connect synchronously with providers via videoconference.
2. **Store-and-forward** refers to the transmission of data, images, sound or video from one care site to another for evaluation.
3. **Remote patient monitoring** involves collecting a patient's vital signs or other health data while the patient is at home or another site and transferring the data to a remote provider for monitoring and response as needed.

## 3 Things to Know:

- 1 Telehealth uses **electronic information and telecommunications technologies** to provide health care when a patient and provider are not in the same place at the same time.
- 2 The three primary methods of telehealth are **real-time communication, store-and-forward and remote patient monitoring**.
- 3 Telehealth is one strategy to **increase access to health care for patients living in rural and underserved areas**, where care often is limited due to workforce shortages.

# Who Benefits From Telehealth?

Telehealth can be a [win-win solution](#) for patients living in rural and underserved areas and the providers who treat them.



## How Patients Benefit:

- Increases access to primary and specialty care in a timely manner without having to travel long distances.
- Reduces exposure to COVID-19 and other illnesses, which can be more prevalent in health care settings.
- Lowers patient costs and the burdens associated with lost work time, transportation and child care.
- Shortens wait times to see providers, particularly specialists.

## How Providers Benefit:

- Builds and supplements workforce capacity in rural areas, where recruiting and retaining health care workers is a challenge.
- Allows primary care providers to more easily connect patients to specialty care where it is not readily available.
- Facilitates consultations between providers both local and remote.
- Allows providers to offer care in various settings, such as home health clinics, hospitals and offices.

Challenges remain as states continue to adopt and refine their telehealth laws and regulations. To support telehealth and health information exchange, access to broadband services and technology is key. Some rural areas do not currently have access to high-speed internet connections, which allow data to be transmitted efficiently. Ensuring that the quality of telehealth care is comparable to that provided during in-person visits is another issue being addressed by policymakers and other stakeholders.

### About the Telehealth Explainer Series

As state leaders seek to capitalize on the potential for telehealth to support the health care workforce and improve access to care, a number of state policy issues may arise. This new series of explainer briefs addresses six aspects of telehealth to better inform policymaking for state lawmakers.

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