

Virtual Healthcare Use Among Medicare Advantage Members Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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OVERVIEW

Virtual care among Medicare Advantage (MA) enrollees grew exponentially in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, though use was uneven across demographic groups. Most notably, older individuals used a smaller share of virtual services than would be expected based on their 2019 in-person utilization.

Virtual healthcare is care rendered without an in-person encounter, including phone, video, or email discussions between a patient and clinician. Prior to the pandemic, despite consumer interest, few Medicare beneficiaries had experienced a virtual encounter.

The pandemic and stay-at-home orders—along with the easing of rules governing virtual care use—rapidly shifted providers’ and consumers’ acceptance of virtual healthcare. Virtual delivery of care reduces consumers’ and clinicians’ exposure to COVID-19, while ensuring that individuals receive needed services and providers can maintain their practices. This brief compares virtual healthcare use during the pandemic with utilization in earlier time periods among members of Anthem’s affiliated MA plans.

Topics

- Factors influencing adoption of virtual care before and during the pandemic
- Methodology
- Use of virtual services by demographics and clinical characteristics
- Discussion of findings

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