



TELEHEALTH OFFERS SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH COST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TODAY'S ISSUES.

Every day technology continues its rapid advance into all facets of our personal and work lives. Today, we have wide spread smart phone usage, improved camera and video technology and faster, more reliable internet access. These advances have allowed the ability for face to face video visits with health care and mental health providers to accelerate. When you factor in population growth, increased medical costs and projections by the Association of American Medical Colleges showing a potential shortage of up to 49,000 primary care physicians by 2030; it is clear telehealth is set to grow dramatically. Telehealth can generally be defined as a way to provide a broad range of health-related services by phone or through an online platform.

While the terms telehealth and telemedicine are often used interchangeably they are in fact two separate items. Telehealth is utilization of technology from consumers to provider to solve non- acute and behavioral health therapy. Telemedicine is most often the collaboration of providers via technology to handle complex case management, disease management and even surgery.

Research firm IHS Markit estimates that telehealth visits in the US will soar from 23 million in 2017 to 105 million in 2022. With companies including CVS and Walgreens currently

offering products and increased attention and money from private equity, this market will continue to rapidly expand and offer new services. Currently, it is estimated that 80% of mid-sized and large companies offer telemedicine services up from 18% in 2014. More school districts should be looking at implementing telehealth as a part of their overall employee benefits strategy.

Telehealth medical services fill in the gaps for many situations. For example:

- college students living out of their parent's health insurance providers service area,
- a member on vacation who forgets their prescription,
- a late night or out of network non-acute issue including cold, flu, sinus infections, acid reflux, pink eye or lice to name a few.

These services are provided by board certified providers and generally available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.

WHAT IS THE NEED FOR TELEHEALTH?

In a 2018 study, about 40% of Americans reported skipping a recommended medical test or treatment, and 44% say they did not go to a doctor when they were sick or injured in the last year because of cost. This is one of the rationales for Walmart announcing in February of 2019 that they were dropping the price for the telehealth service available to their one million employees on their health plan from \$40 to \$4 per session.

Telemedicine is currently used with self-funded, integrated with fully insured health products and sold as stand-alone products. These products are health savings account compatible for those districts offering high deductible health plans.

WEA Trust has been on the leading edge of telehealth and uses Amwell for their telehealth offering. This service is available for members anywhere in the US. For a high deductible health plan a telehealth visit is \$49, otherwise it is a \$0 copay for all other plans.

According to Melanie Schoenemann, Director of Sales at NeuGen/WEA Trust the impact from Telemedicine is meaningful.

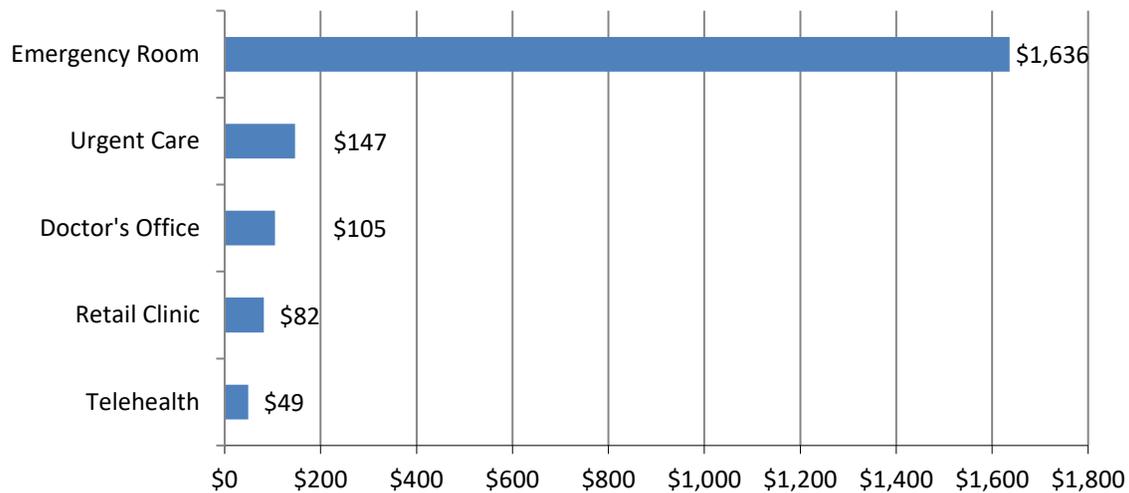
"In total for 2018, there was a potential savings of over \$6,000,000 from Emergency Room and Urgent Care visits had members used telehealth instead. On average in Wisconsin, we see Urgent Care visits costing around \$180 and Emergency Room at \$1,200. Last year our members saved over \$3,600,000 by using telehealth."

A growing number of local and national health insurance providers are beginning to offer their own versions of telehealth. Each has its own benefits and limitations. These range in cost from \$10-\$59.

Nationwide the numbers are even more dramatic. For studies that have been done, savings ranging from \$201 - \$367 in savings per episode when choosing telehealth vs. other facilities. This assumes ER costs are between \$1,400 and \$3,400, and urgent care costs are between \$134 and \$661 per episode.

National averages are as follows:

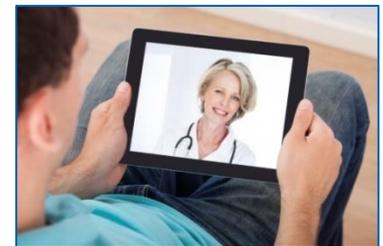
Cost per Visit (National Average)



HOW DOES THE TECHNOLOGY WORK?

Telehealth allows members to connect to a provider using a smart phone, tablet or video enabled computer. Sessions generally take less than 10 minutes to connect to the provider; often, it's less than 90 seconds. The provider will ask members their symptoms and how they are feeling just like a face to face

in-person visit. Additionally, they may ask for a picture of a wound or rash. They will diagnose the condition and if needed send a prescription to the member's local



pharmacy of choice (even if they are out of state).

A transcript of the session can be emailed to the member to provide to their primary care provider. If the telehealth provider is unable to assist the member and recommends they seek services at an urgent care or emergency room, the member generally will not be charged for the call. Additionally, with some health care providers if there is a charge for the telehealth session, the cost applies toward the members' annual maximum out of pocket.

There are several implementation strategies that districts need to focus on in order to get employees to embrace this technology. It starts with education: 1.) How the technology works 2.) When to use it and 3.) What solutions it will provide. As importantly, they need to understand the financial impact for them personally both short term and long term. Using telehealth will help keep their out of pocket costs down and may help keep renewals lower.

Utilization of the technology will increase if the employee has the application downloaded and their basic information entered **prior** to needing the service. When you are not feeling well is not the best time to have to spend the 5-15 minutes to complete your personal and insurance information. This training can be efficiently and quickly accomplished during open enrollment meetings or employee benefit meetings during in-service days. This is also a great time to review other value added services provided by your carriers including wellness plans, cancer concierge, will preparation, ID theft, travel assistance programs, EAP and more.

School districts are adapting and adding telehealth as a part of the strategy to control costs and stabilize premiums. Prairie Du Chien District Administrator Bob Smudde sees the convenience of telehealth.

"When we meet with our consultant from TRICOR and Account Manager from WEA we see the real cost saving and impact of having employees embrace this technology. We want employees to use urgent care and ER services when appropriate, but offering the telehealth services makes sense for employees and their dependents. It offers quality care that is more convenient for employees and their families at a fraction of the price."

APPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

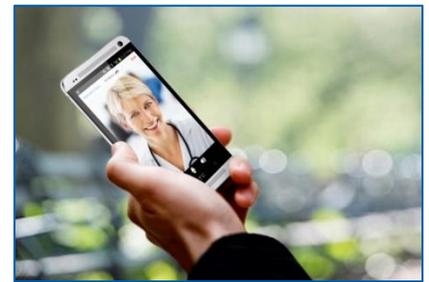
As exciting as telehealth is for health issues, its applications for mental health may provide not only life-changing but life-saving care. WEA Trust is the first health plan in the state to add telehealth therapy to treat common mental health conditions. From chronic concerns such as depression and anxiety to

recent adjustment disorders caused by events such as grief or divorce, online therapy ensures members have affordable and easy access to the care they need. Increased utilization of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) can help fill some gaps, but in many areas, especially rural districts, appointments to visit mental health professions can take 4-5 weeks.

Behavioral Health Issues Covered:

Adjustment Disorders	Depression
Anxiety	Eating Disorders
ADHA	Panic Attacks
Social Anxiety	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	Post-Partum Depression

Telehealth allows members to schedule a 45 minute session with a licensed Masters or Doctoral level clinician from the comfort of their home when it is most convenient for them.



Sessions are available from 7:00AM to 11:00PM. Members are allowed to review providers prior to scheduling and making their appointment to research their background and specialty. WEA Trust provides these services to most plan members at no cost. High deductible health plan members will pay just \$80-95 to stay compliant with IRS guidelines. Members appreciate the confidentiality, convenience and affordability of teleservices and can schedule additional sessions with the same therapist if they want. These sessions work equally as well for college age students away from home struggling with any number of topics. According to a study by the Journal of Affective Disorder, online video-based therapy is as effective as in-person therapy.

Smudde, a licensed school psychologist, sees first-hand the issues facing students, staff and community members. He comments:

"The need for mental health services is growing and unserved. The number of people who need services far outstrips the providers and services available. This is a service that can offer the help people in need in a more suitable timeframe without the need to physically go to a treatment center. Frankly, some people can't wait 5 weeks to see a provider."

Telehealth is just one part of an employee benefits strategy. There is no silver bullet to solve all the problems with health care and mental health services, but providing meaningful, thoughtful, cost-effective solutions to your employees is a step in the right direction.

employee benefits please contact any member our Employee Benefits team at www.tricorinsurance.com

Brent Straka is a Senior Employee Benefits Specialist and a partner at TRICOR Insurance servicing Wisconsin's public and private sector employers. For more information on this topic or