



## **AP-NORC SURVEY: USE OF TELEHEALTH BY OLDER ADULTS WIDESPREAD DURING THE PANDEMIC, BUT ADDRESSING ACCESS ISSUES AND QUALITY CONCERNS KEY TO SUSTAINING ITS USE**

*Telehealth is beneficial for those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and those with transportation challenges; addressing equity issues for older adults, lower-income, and lower-educated will be key to sustain its use.*

**Chicago, IL, December 15, 2021**—Use of telehealth has been common during the pandemic [according to a new study](#) of adults age 50 and older from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But while access to telehealth was similar based on age, education, income, and race and ethnicity, these groups have different reasons for using—or not using—it.

According to the survey, funded by The SCAN Foundation, 62% of adults age 50 and older have received care through some form of telehealth since the beginning of the pandemic, especially for non-urgent health concerns and prescription consultations. Those who have received care through telehealth were generally comfortable doing so, and nearly two-thirds are at least somewhat likely to seek care through telehealth after the pandemic ends.

The convenience of finding an appointment, meeting with a specific provider, and getting an immediate response are the top reasons why adults age 50 and older choose telehealth over in-person care. On the other hand, about two-thirds express concerns about the quality of care received through telehealth.

Worries about using technology were particularly salient for those age 65 and older, those without a college degree, and those with incomes below \$50,000 a year, with each of these groups citing concerns about accessing the necessary devices or programs to use telehealth as a reason to choose an in-person visit instead.

On the other hand, lower-income adults especially cite how telehealth helps them address a lack of transportation to an appointment, provides them with a cheaper option than in-person care, and allows them to more easily involve a support person in their care.

Older adults said they would be more comfortable with telehealth if they had a prior relationship with their doctor, the option to exchange emails or direct messages, and information from insurance on what types of telehealth are covered. More than half would also welcome help learning the necessary technology. For lower-income older adults in particular, having the doctor provide the necessary devices would be helpful.

“The expanded use of telehealth provides a tremendous opportunity to rethink how we provide health care through the lens of equity and inclusion,” said Dr. Sarita A. Mohanty, president and CEO of The SCAN Foundation. “Older adults see telehealth as a faster, more convenient, and in some cases more

affordable way to access care. Addressing their concerns about access to technology and quality of care could go a long way to expanding its use even further.”

Turning to race and ethnicity, 64% of nonwhite adults age 50 and older have used telehealth since the start of the pandemic, and they are more likely than white older adults to cite avoiding COVID-19 exposure as a key benefit. However, 63% of nonwhite adults age 50 and older are at least somewhat concerned about receiving lower-quality care than in-person visits.

There are more differences between nonwhite and white respondents when it comes to concerns about in-person care than about telehealth. Nonwhite respondents report greater concern than white respondents with receiving low-quality care, the security of their health information, lacking privacy, health care coverage or reimbursement, and not having a personal relationship with their doctor for in-person care.

Nonwhite respondents are also more likely than white respondents to cite concerns about doctors not understanding their cultural preferences, and this is true for both telehealth and in-person care.

“Telehealth has allowed so many to continue to access the health care system while avoiding exposure to COVID-19 during the pandemic, but it hasn’t erased the systemic inequities in our health care system,” said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. “Whether in-person or online, older adults of color continue to worry about the quality of care they receive and the ability of their providers to understand their cultural background and preferences.”

### **About the Study**

This survey, funded by The SCAN Foundation, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and The SCAN Foundation collaborated on all aspects of the study.

### **Survey Methodology**

The nationwide poll was conducted in English between November 12 and November 15, 2021, using the Foresight 50+ Consumer Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population of adults age 50 and older. Online and telephone interviews using landline and cell phones were conducted with adults age 50 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia; 1,000 completed the survey—933 via the web and 67 via telephone. The panel excluded recipients of long-term care who live in some institutional types of settings, such as skilled nursing facilities or nursing homes, depending on how address are listed for the facility. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.3 percentage points.

For more information, please visit [www.longtermcarepoll.org](http://www.longtermcarepoll.org).

### **About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research**

Celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

#### **About The SCAN Foundation**

Supported by a grant from The SCAN Foundation - advancing a coordinated and easily navigated system of high-quality services for older adults that preserve dignity and independence.

[www.TheSCANFoundation.org](http://www.TheSCANFoundation.org)

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