



# Transforming care delivery with telehealth at Kaiser Permanente

Telehealth technologies enable Kaiser Permanente members to receive a wide variety of clinical care and services from their physicians and care teams free from geographic constraints. These technologies include video, phone, and email, used for interactions between patients and health professionals, as well as for remote patient monitoring, remote evaluation of prerecorded video or images, and virtual consultations between practitioners.

At Kaiser Permanente, telehealth is a key component of our integrated approach to delivering high-quality care (as shown in the graphic below). Industrywide adoption of telehealth by health care providers has increased in recent years, but there are significant policy and payment barriers to widespread use. That's why Kaiser Permanente advocates for policies that facilitate broader access to care through these modalities.

## Meeting consumer demand for telehealth

Consumers seek a combination of in-person and virtual health

services. Research conducted by Accenture Technologies found that 75% of Americans say technology is important for managing their health. Respondents said that, if given the choice, they would like to use virtual care to: have after-hours appointments (73%), attend classes about a health condition (71%), have follow-up appointments after office visits (65%), discuss health concerns with providers (62%), get post-hospitalization follow-up services (62%), participate in a family member's medical appointment (59%), have an exam for a nonurgent condition (57%), participate in mental health group therapy or counseling (52%), have an exam by a specialist for an urgent condition (29%), and have an annual physical exam (28%).<sup>1</sup>

### Telehealth at Kaiser Permanente:

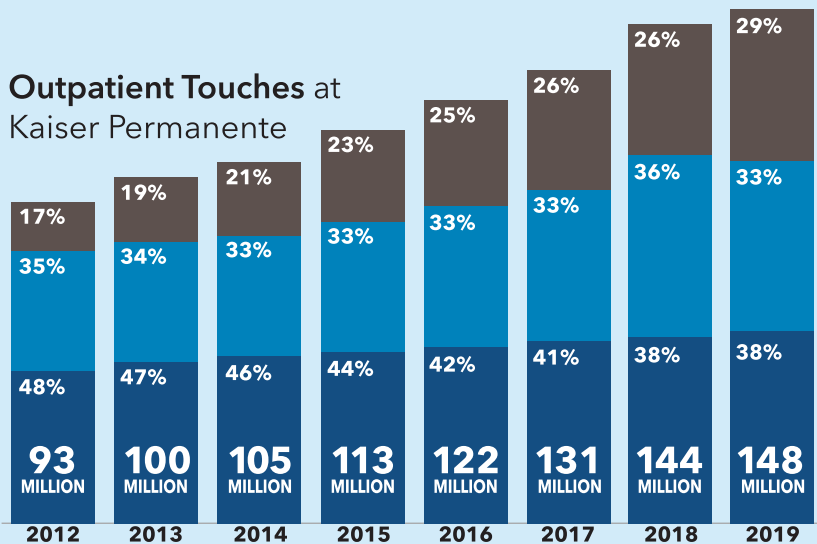
- Has been available to our members in various forms since the late 1990s as a seamless part of how our clinical professionals deliver care – as opposed to being an outsourced add-on service

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## DELIVERING THE RIGHT CARE IN THE RIGHT SETTING



Outpatient Touches at Kaiser Permanente



In 2019,  
**62%**  
electronic medical record-enabled, telehealth touches

Source: Core Value Metrics Report, Kaiser Permanente, 2019



**8 million** appointments scheduled online  
**34.2 million** prescriptions filled online  
**60.6 million** lab tests viewed  
**78.5%** of eligible members registered

**30%**  
growth in video visits in 2019



Source: Kaiser Permanente Digital Metrics, 2019 Annual Report

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- Is integrated into our electronic health record system, Kaiser Permanente HealthConnect®, enabling highly coordinated care across clinical professionals and at the point of care
- Includes a wide range of options for how and where members access care, including phone, secure email, and video

## Telehealth adoption across Kaiser Permanente

The improvement of connectivity has made telehealth more convenient than ever for consumers – empowering them to choose where, when, and how they receive care. When patients choose to have a phone, video, or email interaction with any Kaiser Permanente care provider, they can expect the same high-quality care they get in person at any Kaiser Permanente facility. The result is often an acceleration of care, breaking down the barriers between patients and the care they need. Since 2012, the number of telehealth “touches” between Kaiser Permanente members and clinical professionals has exceeded members’ in-person visits.

## Using telehealth to drive quality

Kaiser Permanente’s telestroke program is an example of how Kaiser Permanente hospitals are applying telehealth to improve quality of care. The program allows emergency physicians at a hospital without an in-house neurological intensive care unit to engage a neurologist, often before the patient arrives at the emergency room.

When stroke patients arrive in the emergency department, they need to see both a neurologist and a radiologist before blood clot-dissolving treatment can be administered. Special beds equipped with mobile video devices enable neurologists to visually evaluate a patient from wherever they may be – at another hospital, at a clinic, or from home. The neurologist can also virtually accompany the patient to the radiology department. The doctors can then, together, review the imaging results and quickly decide whether to administer the treatment.<sup>2</sup>

## Continuing work on telehealth adoption

Kaiser Permanente advocates for policy and payment changes at the federal and state levels to enable telehealth applications to be used more broadly. Challenges include:

- **Medicare coverage of telehealth:** Persistent advocacy by Kaiser Permanente and other stakeholders has led to significant progress in expanding access to telehealth

for Medicare beneficiaries. Statutory changes under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 now allow Medicare Advantage plans to include more expansive coverage for telehealth services without the need for a supplemental benefit, which had previously been needed in order to offer more than the basic covered Medicare telehealth services (a limited set of services available only to rural and underserved areas of the country). In addition, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services used its regulatory authority to implement new covered services in original Medicare, which are now also covered in Medicare Advantage. These include remote patient monitoring, brief virtual check-ins, remote evaluation of pre-recorded video or images, and virtual consultations between practitioners.

These changes have helped address Medicare’s historically limited coverage of telehealth services, which is widely acknowledged as the biggest policy barrier to broad adoption of telehealth. More can be done to expand access to telehealth, however, and Kaiser Permanente continues to advocate at the federal level to refine telehealth coverage policies and expand coverage.

- **Different rules governing telehealth among states:** No 2 states are alike in their treatment of telehealth – including differences in the definition of telehealth, requirements for coverage and payment parity with in-person services, the need to obtain consent, and other provisions. This makes it challenging to scale solutions and workflows across jurisdictions. Kaiser Permanente participates in the legislative and regulatory processes in its jurisdictions to ensure favorable changes that enable broader telehealth availability and, to the extent possible, the adoption of consistent rules.
- **Physician licensure requirements by state:** State medical boards rightly ensure consumer protection through licensure processes. Kaiser Permanente supports legislation in the states in which we operate that would implement the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, allowing physicians to provide care to our patients via telehealth.

These changes would expand access to telehealth for all patients, including Medicare beneficiaries who are Kaiser Permanente members, and other Medicare beneficiaries across the country. As a critical component to its integrated care delivery model, Kaiser Permanente will continue to champion legislation that facilitates access to telehealth.

1 Accenture Consulting, “Meet Today’s Healthcare Team: Patients + Doctors + Machines: Accenture 2018 Consumer Survey on Digital Health” [https://www.accenture.com/\\_acnmedia/PDF-71/Accenture-Health-Meet-Todays-Healthcare-Team-Patients-Doctors-Machines.pdf#zoom=50](https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-71/Accenture-Health-Meet-Todays-Healthcare-Team-Patients-Doctors-Machines.pdf#zoom=50), accessed January 15, 2020.

2 Kaiser Permanente internal data