

## CHEAT SHEET

for US health care providers

# Telehealth in Maternal Care

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Using virtual visits to help manage pre- and post-natal care

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## Key takeaways

- Telehealth offers women new and more convenient ways to connect with maternal health providers through a variety of telehealth modalities, including live audiovisual visits, remote patient monitoring, and asynchronous store-and-forward technology.
- Maternal telehealth programs vary in whether they target low-risk (routine) pregnancies, high-risk pregnancies, or postpartum care.
- In addition to improving patient outcomes, a telehealth offering can be a program differentiator, signaling a progressive, patient-focused practice and helping build patient loyalty to a health system.

# What is it?

Maternal telehealth programs offer pregnant women new and more convenient ways to connect with obstetric providers. These programs can cover both the prenatal and/or postpartum periods, strengthening patient-provider relationships and allowing providers to monitor patients more frequently between in-person office visits. The goal of these programs is to make care more convenient, improve outcomes, and enhance the patient experience.

## Telehealth's role in maternal care

There are three primary ways telehealth can add value for different groups of patients.

**Low-risk pregnancies:** Replaces subset of prenatal visits and enables more frequent provider-patient interactions between in-person visits.

**High-risk pregnancies:** Improves access to maternal-fetal medicine (MFM) specialist care and enables more robust monitoring and frequent communication between patients and providers.

**Postpartum care:** Provides women the support they need to care for their babies and helps monitor potential complications during recovery, including mental health illnesses unique to new mothers.

# Why does it matter?

The frequency and distance of travel is challenging for women, especially those late in their pregnancy or who must take time off work. Prenatal and postpartum care requires a minimum of 12 appointments, and the shortage of maternal health care providers only adds to travel times. The provider shortage is more noticeable in rural areas, as ob/gyns and MFM specialists are concentrated in urban areas and not likely to relocate to rural areas. This means that many rural women travel more than 30 minutes to access care.

The barriers to accessing care cause women to miss key pregnancy-related public health targets, including breastfeeding for six months and attending postpartum check ups. As a result, the U.S. has some of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the developed world, and outcomes have worsened over time.<sup>1</sup> Mortality rates are even worse for Black women<sup>2</sup> and women who live in rural areas.

The convenience of telehealth helps women access prenatal and postpartum care regularly. Regular access to maternal health care leads to downstream benefits such as increased access to specialty care, improved birth outcomes, reduced geographic health disparities, and enhanced patient experience.

Telehealth offerings can also be a program differentiator, signaling a progressive, patient-focused practice. Women of childbearing age are often the key health care decision-makers in their households. Building strong loyalty to a health system among this group is particularly important for providers as women tend to decide where their families will go for care.

1. 17.4 per 100,000 live births in 2018, compared to 12.7 per 100,000 live births in 2007.  
2. 37.1 per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic black women.

Source: "How telemedicine can help close the maternal health gap", Healthcare IT News, June 24, 2020; "First Data Released on Maternal Mortality in Over a Decade", CDC, January 30, 2020; "Improving Access to Maternal Health Care in Rural Communities", CMS; Wentz-Graff K, "Women responsible for most health decisions in the home", OHSU, May 11, 2017; Muller E, "What to Expect When You're Expecting With Telehealth", Health Recovery Solutions.

# How does it work?

Because routine prenatal care is typically reimbursed through a bundled payment, providers may be able to substitute virtual visits for in-person visits without any reduction in reimbursement (though providers should always check with their contracted payers).

All three major telehealth modalities—live virtual visits, remote patient monitoring, and asynchronous store-and-forward communication—have a role in maternal health care.

## Telehealth modalities in care delivery

	Low-risk pregnancy	High-risk pregnancy	Postpartum care
<b>Live audiovisual visit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace up to seven of their standard 12 to 14 in-person prenatal visits with video visits with their regular provider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receive MFM consultation via video visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support range of follow-up visits, particularly routine postpartum check ups and consultations with a lactation specialist</li> </ul>
<b>Remote patient monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supplement virtual visits to reduce need for regular check-ins</li> <li>Use several devices to track vitals at home (typically a blood pressure cuff, fetal Doppler monitor, and scale)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor patients in between standard visits</li> <li>Use the same devices as low-risk women, or additional devices such as blood glucose monitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use apps and online portals to track and report postpartum status, particularly mental health state</li> </ul>
<b>Asynchronous store-and-forward</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit questions to providers between visits</li> <li>Can supplement video visits, enable a reduction in overall visits, or simply provide a new way for patients to interact with their providers in between regular in-person visits</li> </ul>	<p>Provider-to-patient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit questions to their providers in between visits</li> </ul> <p>Provider-to-provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ob-gyns share a patient's records with a remote MFM specialist, who reviews and responds with care plan recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit questions to a provider, whether their ob-gyn, a nurse specialist, or a lactation consultant</li> </ul>

Source: Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

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# Conversations you should be having

## 01

Define the scope of your maternal care program to fit into your existing strategy. All telehealth programs should help solve a problem and should target the patient population that would benefit most from the convenience of telehealth.

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## 02


Discuss how you will raise awareness about your maternal care telehealth program among patients and providers. Building excitement is vital for the overall success of the program.

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## 03

Discuss how you will define success of your maternal care telehealth program and which metrics you need to track to measure your progress to successful outcomes.

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Telehealth programs, especially those that are meant to offer convenience to busy patients, are most successful when the technology is user-friendly and intuitive. Don't overlook the importance of helping the patient navigate their virtual journey, especially if the patient is a first-time telehealth user. 

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