

# Addressing the Pandemic's Impact: *Telehealth Services in Virginia*

*Virginia Telehealth Network is a 501c3 nonprofit membership organization with a mission of promoting telehealth efforts in the Commonwealth. And, when telehealth rapidly evolved during the pandemic, VTN followed suit.*



During the era of COVID – that frenetic period from spring 2020 through the end of 2021 – VTN has worked to keep pace with the momentum that has swept through the arena of telehealth.

Over the past 18 months, we have not only lent our expertise to help healthcare organizations tap into the full capacity of telemedicine, but we also reacclimated ourselves by listening to and learning from health care professionals across the Commonwealth – a posture that has helped us better address the ways in which their needs surrounding telehealth have changed.

Through a variety of efforts – including educational summits, a content series and comprehensive research – VTN has received timely insights from health care professionals and other stakeholders to better understand the future landscape of telehealth and the strategy necessary to optimize its potential.

The following is a summary of that work and what's to come in 2022.





## Advocacy Efforts

During the 2020 General Assembly Special Session VTN codified lifting restrictions as part of the COVID State of Emergency and clarified the definition of telemedicine, including the following changes:

- Telemedicine to not include audio only for reimbursement.
- Changes to prescribing via telemedicine to ensure the schedule of drugs are consistent with federal laws.
- Payment for ROM for high-risk pregnancies, medically complex infants and children, transplant patients, patients who have undergone surgery, and patients with chronic health contortions with 2 or more hospitalizations in the previous 12 months

During the 2021 General Assembly Regular Session, VTN passed Medicaid coverage for remote patient monitoring for specific conditions.

## VTN Summit

In April 2021, VTN hosted the 2021 Virtual Summit, Making the Temporary Permanent. This annual summit for VTN took on new meaning given the dramatic

shifts and change that occurred with telehealth since onset of the pandemic. A focus of the Summit which kicked started VTN's Equity and Telehealth series was exploring gaps that still exist despite telehealth's rapid expansion.

### ▶ Results

# 75

registrants

Keynote speakers included:

- Dan Carey, MD, MHCM, Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources
- Ateev Mehrotra, Associate Professor of Health Care Policy and Medicine at Harvard Medical
- Robin Gelburd, President of FAIRHealth
- Jessica Rosenworcel, Acting Chairwoman, Federal Communications Commission
- Andrew Mitchell, Senior Policy Advisor for the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (Medicaid)
- Tim Perkins, Division of Community Health and Technical Resources, Virginia Department of Health



# Virginia's State Telehealth Plan

The General Assembly in 2020 passed legislation requesting the Virginia Department of Health to create a statewide telehealth plan. The onset of the pandemic made these efforts difficult and a minimal plan was created. It is the hope to build upon the learnings of the past 18 months of intense telehealth use to create a robust and comprehensive plan. VTN served on the planning committee for the initial plan. Legislation is keyed up to place VTN in a leadership role in creating this much needed roadmap into the future.

## Equity & Telehealth Initiative

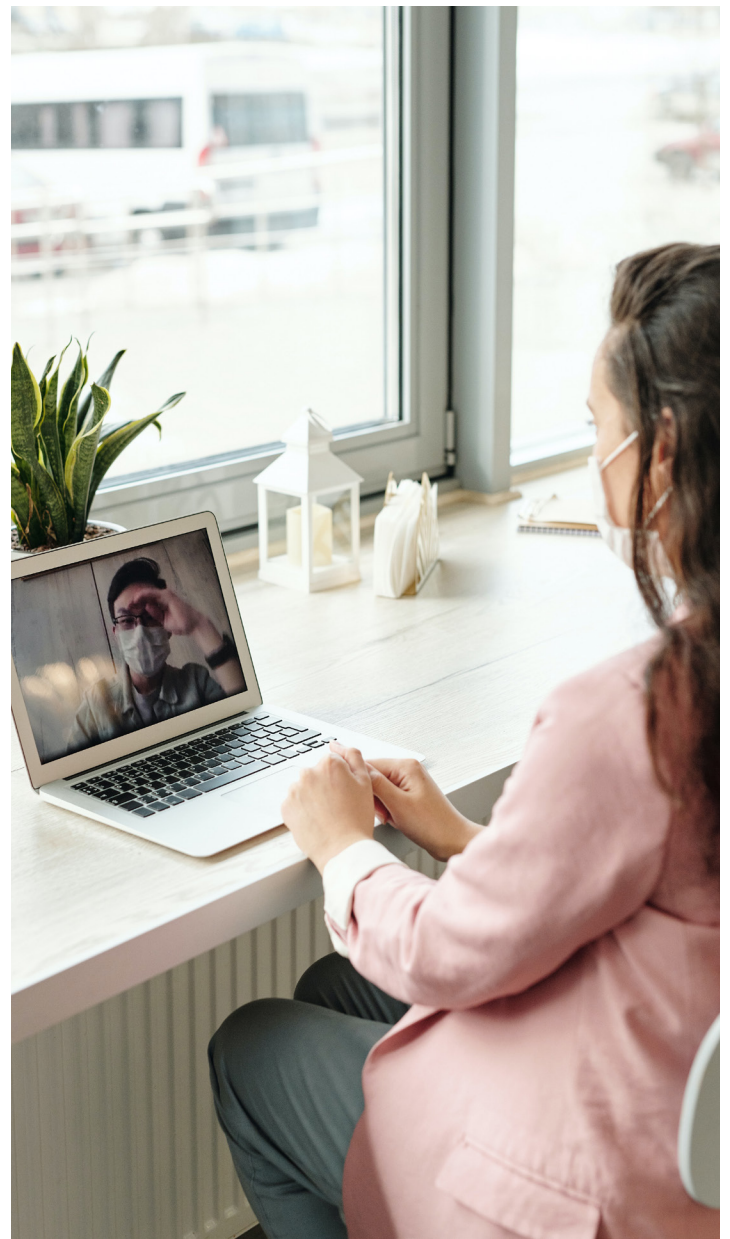
In August 2021, VTN launched its Equity & Telehealth initiative to underscore its commitment to serving those in need.

VTN retained a Virginia communications firm, The Hodges Partnership, to help create the equity series, develop ongoing content and strategically convey that content to the right audience. Topics have included the key areas within telehealth that need to be explored as well as educational resources, experiences from providers across the state and the latest information on equity and telehealth in Virginia. While the equity series is designed to serve as a free resource to health care professionals in Virginia, it also helps to raise awareness about VTN, given the fact that the content series is hosted on the VTN website and optimized through digital platforms.

### Results

**26**  
blog posts

**15,087**  
website visitors in 2021,  
(up from 9,771 in 2020)



# Benchmarking *Telehealth in Virginia*

During Q4 2021, VTN conducted a multipronged “state of the state” of telehealth research effort that surveyed licensed health care providers across the Commonwealth. This effort included:

- An IRB approved short survey sent to all licensed health professional through the Virginia Department of Health Professionals (VDHP). Versions of this survey also were developed for and distributed to: Virginia Health Care Association | Virginia Center for Assisted Living; Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
- Qualitative interviews with health care professionals about their use of telehealth throughout the pandemic.
- A more thorough follow-up survey to glean additional insights from health care professionals. Versions of this survey were developed for and distributed to behavioral and mental health providers and other health care providers.

This data will be used to build a comprehensive plan for telehealth for the state.

## Supporting provider practice needs:

- More than three-quarters (77.3%) agree that telehealth has given them more flexibility in their schedule.
- Only 7.6% do not feel confident in the quality of care they're able to offer their patients via telehealth.
- The overwhelming majority (86.2%) agree that telehealth is an effective tool for providing care to their patients. Two-thirds (67%) agree that telehealth has allowed them to see more patients

## The Future of *Telehealth*

Looking ahead into 2022, much of the future of telehealth augurs on actions by the General Assembly. VTN plans to leverage this experiential information and data into a strategy for the commonwealth that increases the engagement of telehealth stakeholders.

### ▶ Results

**9,257**

participants in the initial short survey

**705**

participants in the follow-up survey

**3 in 4**

respondents (74.7%) currently use telehealth as a health care provider.

Of those not using telehealth, nearly half (45.5%) don't because it isn't compatible with their specialty and/or practice style

Over the past year, telehealth has allowed providers who use it to:

- Offer current patients a virtual care option (93.8%)
- Enhance care coordination for their patients (63.1%)
- Grow patient panel to include new patients from their local community (57%)
- Grow they patient panel to include new patients beyond their local community (56%)

## Equity in care access:

9 in 10 telehealth provider respondents (91.2%) agree that telehealth allowed them to address patient care barriers because of the pandemic.



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