Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)
Telehealth Survey Results Summary

In response to Dr. Elnahal’s request for information about older veterans’ experiences and concerns about telehealth medicine, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) surveyed its membership. Between June 16 – July 18, 2023, we had 358 surveys returned from 47 states. Alaska, Idaho, and New Mexico were not represented. A copy of the survey is available at https://vva.org/programs/veterans-health-care/vva-telehealth-survey/.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (85 percent) were Caucasian males between 71 – 80 years old. None of the respondents claimed to be uninsured. The majority of respondents, approximately 55 percent, use the Department of Veterans Affairs for their primary healthcare coverage, while 36 percent use Medicare. Roughly five percent reported that they rely on private insurance, with the remaining three percent using the Department of Defense’s Tricare coverage.

VVA members using telehealth within the past year include:
- 140 respondents saw a primary care provider;
- 107 visited with a mental health professional;
- 71 saw a specialist; and
- 24 used telehealth to see other healthcare professionals (foot doctor, optometrist, chiropractor, etc.).

The most common reasons for selecting a telehealth visit include:
- Health care professional requested it – 134
- Convenience – 116
- Transportation – 38

![How VVA Members' Telehealth Visits Compare with Office Visits On Various Topics](image-url)
Most respondents felt that telehealth visits were significantly better than office visits in terms of overall convenience. Telehealth visits also scored higher than face-to-face office visits in terms of cost and total time of visit; however, most respondents felt office visits and telehealth visits were about the same for these topics. It appears from these results that for many of the concerns listed, many VVA members evaluate telehealth visits about the same as office visits.

Fifteen veterans completing the survey reported living in a zip code area identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as “Not located in an Urban Area.” We used the Rural Health Information Hub’s, “Am I Rural? – Tool” (https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural) to further identify veterans living in “Health Professional Shortage Areas.” Of the 15 rural veterans, 10 (66.7 percent) lived in an area identified as experiencing a primary care health professional shortage. Eleven (73.3 percent) were identified as experiencing a mental health professional shortage. Although the rural veterans suffered higher levels of healthcare professional shortages, their use of telehealth visits was very similar to the urban veterans. This trend was observed for both primary care and mental health care (see Fig. 1 & 2 below).

![Comparison of Urban and Rural VVA Veterans Primary Care Telehealth Visits July 18, 2923](chart.png)

*Fig. 1. Although rural veterans experienced a higher rate of primary care shortages, their use of primary care telehealth visits (66.7%) was very similar to the urban veterans’ use of primary care telehealth visits (65.1%).*
Fig. 2. Although rural veterans experienced a higher rate of mental healthcare provider shortage, their use of mental healthcare telehealth visits (40.0%) was very similar to the urban veterans’ use of mental healthcare telehealth visits (40.3%).

While both urban and rural veterans experienced a greater shortage of mental healthcare professionals, both groups of veterans participated in fewer mental healthcare telehealth visits. Rural and urban veterans reported primary care telehealth visits in the mid-sixty percent, while both groups’ mental health telehealth visits were in the low forty percent range. Nevertheless, the rate of both groups of VVA veterans were higher than the 35.5% telehealth rate found among all outpatients during the second quarter of 2020.¹

Similar to the University of Michigan National Poll on Health Aging, the greatest telehealth concern of VVA veterans was the inability to conduct a physical examination using telehealth. While the National Poll reported that 75 percent of adults aged 50-80 surveyed in June 2020 had concerns that providers were not able to conduct a physical exam, only 44 percent of VVA veterans reported this concern. Generally, VVA respondents reported less concerns than other adults surveyed in June 2020 (see Table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns About Telehealth Visits</th>
<th>2020 Nat Poll</th>
<th>VVA Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inability to conduct physical exam</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of care</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not feeling connected</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty seeing or hearing</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. A comparison of concerns about telehealth visits among older adults surveyed in June 2020 and Vietnam Veterans of American members surveyed in 2023.

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