

Telehealth Helps People With Cancer Save Time and Money

Patients saved as much as \$222 per telehealth visit during the COVID pandemic.

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Using telehealth is a cost-effective alternative to in-person visits for people with cancer, according to study results published in [JAMA Network Open](#). These findings suggest that by saving money and time, expanding telehealth services could reduce the financial burden of cancer care.

People with cancer often face financial hardship and large time costs related to their care and treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic [curtailed the delivery of cancer care](#), but it also promoted wider use of [telehealth](#), or virtual care.

Krupal Patel, MD, of Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, and colleagues analyzed the estimated cost savings from telehealth among people receiving care for cancer. They conducted an economic evaluation of telehealth visits from April 2020 through June 2021 at Moffitt, a National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center. The primary outcome was estimated cost savings for patients, including travel cost and loss of income due to travel and medical visits.

The researchers evaluated 25,496 telehealth visits for 11,688 adults ages 18 to 65. Of these, 4,525 were new or established visits and 20,971 were follow-up visits. Of the total visits, 61% were for women. The median patient age was 55. A majority of visits (72%) were for Latino/Hispanic individuals, reflecting the local population.

During the first 15 months of the pandemic, the researchers calculated that use of telehealth led to an estimated average cost savings of \$147.40 to \$186.10 per visit, depending on the amount allocated for mileage (\$0.56 or \$0.82 per mile). What's more, telehealth visits saved patients an average of 2.9 hours of round-trip driving time and 1.2 hours of time in the clinic per visit.

The cost savings were greater for new or established telehealth visits, ranging from \$176.60 to \$222.80 per visit. For follow-up visits, the average savings ranged from \$141.10 to \$178.10.

"In this economic evaluation, telehealth was associated with savings in patients' time and travel costs, which may reduce the financial toxicity of cancer care," wrote the researchers. "Expansion of telehealth oncology services may be an effective strategy to reduce the financial burden among patients with cancer."

Future studies, they suggested, should explore other cost savings, such as the savings to cancer caregivers, and how these vary for rural versus urban cancer patients.

Click here to read the study in [JAMA Network Open](#).

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