

Step One in Developing a Comprehensive Telehealth Strategy: Assessing Members' Current Telehealth Utilization



Process for Optimizing Telehealth Utilization Holds Promise for Reducing Costs While Improving Members' Access and Outcomes

The Challenge: Develop an Approach for Continuously Optimizing Telehealth Utilization

For health plans across the U.S., telehealth has the potential to expand patient access to care and improve health outcomes, all while reducing costs. With both providers and patients growing more comfortable with telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, payers now have a major opportunity to encourage increased utilization of telehealth.

But few health plans have significant experience with telehealth or a data-driven strategy for how to effectively sustain and expand its utilization. That's why a mid-sized regional health plan turned to NextHealth Technologies for its analytics solution for optimizing telehealth utilization.

NextHealth's approach involves a customizable process to help health plans improve telehealth utilization. In this case, NextHealth took the following steps to help the health plan:

1. Evaluate members' utilization of telehealth, including pre- and post-COVID trends.
2. Based on utilization, identify biggest initial opportunities for expanded telehealth utilization.
3. Launch campaigns to capitalize on these opportunities.
4. Create a process to continuously evaluate and optimize overall telehealth utilization.



Telehealth holds significant promise:

- **Enables easier access for anyone with an internet connection**
- **AHRQ Report found that telehealth improves outcomes**
- **Potential for lower costs**

A Thorough Methodology

To evaluate current telehealth utilization trends, NextHealth worked with the health plan to first segment their membership in a variety of ways, including by age, gender, tenure, line of business, social determinants of health (social vulnerability, food access, transportation, housing, minority status, household composition, social isolation, socioeconomic level), behavioral health and substance abuse diagnosis, chronic conditions, costs, and provider group.

NextHealth then examined how these member segments were utilizing telehealth and whether telehealth improved costs and outcomes. In conducting this analysis, NextHealth used both a hypothesis-driven approach, testing the hypotheses of the health plan's leaders about telehealth trends and outcomes, and a hypothesis-free analytics approach powered by machine learning.

“NextHealth’s process for analyzing and optimizing telehealth utilization has positioned us to deliver on our promise of great care at low costs.”

Results

Analysis Uncovers Targets and Surprises

NextHealth’s methodology revealed groups that the health plan can target with campaigns and incentives to increase telehealth utilization. For example, NextHealth found that members with high utilization of in-person visits also consistently utilize telehealth.

One surprise was that social determinant of health (SDOH) challenges are not a barrier to telehealth adoption. We looked at the propensity of members with SDOH challenges to utilize telehealth compared to those without such challenges. Overall, we found members rating as low in 7 of 8 SDOH categories had same propensity to use telehealth; the one exception being those members living in areas rated as low on Technology Access.

In addition, the analysis showed that initial significant opportunities for savings include promoting telehealth for behavioral health and diabetic care as well as an alternative to the ER.

Based on these insights, NextHealth recommended member incentives and messaging for these three use cases. After the health plan launches campaigns to capitalize on these opportunities, NextHealth will help the plan refine its strategy in these three areas and launch additional use cases, most likely targeting post-acute care, hypertension, and primary care provider visits. In this way, the plan will implement a data-driven, enterprise-wide telehealth strategy that enables continual optimization of telehealth utilization.



Biggest initial opportunities for savings included promoting telehealth for behavioral health, diabetic care and as an alternative to the ER.



NextHealth designed campaigns ready to launch to capitalize on these three opportunities

To learn more about how to reduce costs and improve outcomes with our analytics and engagement platform, visit nexthealthtechnologies.com.

