

Telehealth Use for Pregnancy Care: Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: Poor access to prenatal care is a key driver of high maternal mortality and morbidity in the U.S. Telehealth could help address this issue and enhance prenatal care. This study examined telehealth use during pregnancy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We explored patient- and provider-level factors associated with telehealth utilization using a large commercial claims dataset from FAIR Health. Findings on patient analysis showed that telehealth use during pregnancy peaked in the first phase of the pandemic. Nearly 30% of patients who delivered in the fourth quarter of 2020 (October to December) used some form of telehealth during their pregnancy. This proportion dropped to approximately 25% in the first quarter of 2021 (January to March) and stabilized in subsequent quarters. Wide variation was observed in state-level trends for telehealth use during pregnancy. The proportion of those who used telehealth during pregnancy and were diagnosed with a mental health condition went up from 32% in the first quarter of 2020 to 42% in the first quarter of 2022. Provider analysis showed that telehealth provision during pregnancy peaked in the first quarter of 2021, whereby nearly 17,000 providers had about 36,000 telehealth visits. Since then, these figures dropped to around 12,000 providers and 27,000 visits. Being female, younger than 55, and practicing in Obstetrics and Gynecology specialty was associated with higher telehealth provision.

Key Words: Telehealth, telemedicine, maternal health, primary care, private insurance.