

# Expanding Telehealth Access – Health Net’s COVID-19 Grant Program

## Key Findings from Harder+Company Community Research, an Independent, Third-Party Analyst Firm

*Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Net’s innovation-first approach to care brought virtual services to patients statewide. At the outset of the pandemic, we recognized the need to address digital disparities and bring critical telehealth services to California’s most vulnerable communities. This recognition and our experience as one of California’s longest-serving Medi-Cal partners drove our pandemic response and our work to expand telehealth services to some of the most vulnerable communities in just seven weeks. Harder+Company Community Research evaluated Health Net’s COVID-19 Grant Program, catalogued best practices and provided unbiased feedback in a comprehensive report.*

## Program Overview: Bridging the Divide in Telehealth

At the onset of the pandemic, Health Net collaborated with the California Department of Managed Health Care to bring telehealth to underserved patients, awarding 138 Medi-Cal providers across California \$13.4 million in grants to establish or expand their digital health practice.

### Key Features of Health Net’s Initiative:

- Largest telehealth cash grant from any health plan in California
- 100% of funding directed to Medi-Cal Providers
- Nearly 20% of Health Net’s grantees reported having no telehealth services at the onset of the program

**138 grants,  
totalling  
\$13.4  
million**

## Bringing Telemedicine to More Medi-Cal Patients & Providers

**A Rapid Increase:** On average, providers increased telehealth visits to 45% during the grant period, compared to 2% prior to the pandemic – over a 20-fold increase.

Health Net’s telehealth investments were designed to build and expand telehealth specifically for Medi-Cal providers serving some of the most vulnerable patients who face the greatest barriers to care. As summarized in Harder+Company’s report – broadly, grantees used **roughly 30% of the funds to train staff and nearly 70% to buy software, video equipment and more.** As a result, grantees grew their ability to provide remote care to patients:



### Preventative Care:

**31%** were able to conduct routine check-ups or wellness checks for their patients.



### Health Screenings:

**42%** identified telehealth as an important tool for patient screenings, including chronic diseases such as diabetes.



### Health Education:

**17%** provided health education, including nutrition and physical activity counseling, diabetes education and smoking cessation.



### Mental Health:

**16%** had success providing counseling and other mental health services.

# Lessons Learned: Assessing Telehealth Through the Lens of Medi-Cal

Through close collaboration with grantees, Health Net identified successes and challenges providers faced in expanding their digital health practice. These direct insights – all of which are compiled in Harder+Company’s report – are key to ensuring we continue to enhance access to care for the most vulnerable communities.

## Closing Digital Care Gaps – Insights from Providers

Telehealth services proved to be a critical tool for Medi-Cal patients who face barriers to care, such as transportation, location and financial restraints. However, providers also ran into challenges when expanding virtual care options – including access to technology, reliable internet access and more.

- **82% of providers** said that patients had problems accessing technology and internet
- **24% of providers** had problems learning new technology
- **12% of patients** preferred in-person care
- **7% of patients** had privacy concerns

To truly solidify telehealth’s role in the healthcare delivery system, we must address these challenges to bridge the divide in access to digital care.

“One of the biggest successes of providing telehealth services, and telehealth services becoming a more acceptable communication channel between patients and medical providers, was [our] ability to reach more patients who typically did not access care regularly, if at all.” –**Grant Recipient**

## Steps to Ensure the Future of Telemedicine

Sixty percent of Medi-Cal providers supported by Health Net said the addition of telehealth provided financial stability for their organization and eighty-five percent of providers plan to integrate telehealth as a sustainable practice for patients going forward. So, it is critical that we continue to improve access for those who need it most. Expanding telehealth will require:

-  Advocating for continued cost reimbursement for telehealth services
-  Ensuring future funding to continue to support expansion of telehealth services
-  Supporting patient access to telehealth services



**60%** of providers said the addition of telehealth provided financial stability for their organization.

**85%** of providers plan to integrate telehealth as a sustainable practice for patients.

*At Health Net, we invest in innovative solutions, and we now look ahead to develop new tools to meet tomorrow’s challenges today. As California envisions the future of Medi-Cal under CalAIM, we’re here as a committed, trusted partner. Health Net brings experience, relationships, understanding and innovative solutions to address all factors that impact health.*