

Telehealth Use Remains Low in Rural Areas

Researchers examined the use of telehealth services among people in need of prenatal care in rural and urban areas.

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A new study highlights the underutilization of [telehealth](#) services among people living in [rural](#) areas in need of maternity care, according to a [University of South Carolina news release](#).

Conducted by the Rural and Minority Health Research Center at the University of South Carolina, the study found that while the use of hybrid [prenatal care](#)—meaning telehealth and in-person visits—increased among Black and Latino groups, rural communities lagged behind urban populations in uptake.

“Hybrid care increased from nearly none in 2018, peaking at 8.1% in 2020 before decreasing to 6.2% in 2022. This was a significant increase—particularly for Black and Hispanic individuals—but overall rates remain low, and the rural-urban gap persists,” said lead study author, Peiyin Hung, PhD, the center’s co-director in the news release.

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, insurance and government agencies have encouraged people to avail themselves of telehealth services; however, rural residents have used such services to a much lesser degree due to barriers such as insufficient broadband infrastructure and limited device access. Indeed, [a 2023 study](#) identified travel burden and digital [access](#) as barriers to maternity care among socially disadvantaged communities.

For the current study, [published in JAMA Network Open](#), researchers looked at the electronic health records of nearly 350,000 pregnancies in the United States from 2018 to 2020. They examined the use of telehealth and in-person prenatal care services across different racial groups and found that residents of urban areas were about twice as likely to use hybrid prenatal care compared with rural residents.

“Prenatal care is crucial for the nearly four million individuals who give birth each year in the U.S.,” Hung said. “Barriers to accessing this care can adversely impact maternal and neonatal health.”

While some prenatal care is best offered in person, telehealth services can connect patients with health care professionals for routine check-ins, lab results, prenatal education and more.

“There is an urgent need to develop strategies that improve equitable access to telehealth for rural communities to address these disparities and optimize prenatal care across diverse populations,” Hung said.

For more, click [#Telemedicine](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Internet Access Linked to Earlier Stage Non-Small-Cell Lung Cancer Diagnosis and Care](#),” “[Gen Z: Plugged In, But Not to Their Health](#)” and “[Telemedicine Led to Higher Hepatitis C Cure Rate for People With Opioid Use Disorder](#).”