

5 ways the flexibility of virtual care helps people stay on top of their health

While people generally care about staying healthy, sometimes getting the care they need can be challenging or inconvenient. They may experience long wait times, travel distances, or find there is limited availability of providers.

Virtual care can complement traditional in-person care by providing more convenience and choices in how to manage individual health and wellness.

Here are five ways virtual care offers greater flexibility in maintaining good health.

1. Connect quicker for care

One of the primary benefits of virtual care is its ability to provide quicker access to health care professionals compared to making in-person appointments. Currently, the average wait time for a physician appointment for new patients is [26 days](#).¹ Patients who need mental health care may have to [wait up to three months or longer](#) to see a therapist or psychologist.² Virtual care appointments can cut this wait time down to just a few days, and may even offer same-day physician appointments for urgent care or routine visits.

Of course, virtual visits cannot, and should not, completely replace in-person appointments – but they can provide timely access for routine care, minor medical problems (including issues with skin, hair, and nails), and behavioral health concerns.

2. Reduce the need for travel

[Research](#) has shown that more than 1 in 5 adults with limited transit access forgo health care because of transportation barriers, and those with mobility challenges are more than three times as likely to forego their care for the same reason.³ Virtual care enables these patients to connect with health care providers from the comfort of their homes, reducing the need for travel. This benefits patients who lack convenient transportation options as well as those who have schedules that do not allow for travel time.

3. Expand the choice of providers

Virtual care has the potential to offer more care choices for people who live in areas with limited in-person options. According to the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#), 75 million Americans live in areas with very few primary care doctors, and 122 million people live in places with a significant shortage in mental health services.⁴ Virtual care can help bridge these gaps in health care availability by offering convenient connections to expert care providers from distant locations.

4. Schedule appointments anytime

Unlike traditional health care settings, which typically operate on standard business hours, some virtual care services are available 24/7. This allows patients to consult with a health care provider at a time that best suits their schedule and lifestyle.

5. No appointment necessary for minor issues

Virtual care can also be provided asynchronously, which means patients and health care providers would communicate electronically, enabling consultations for minor illnesses without the need for scheduled, live virtual appointments. Patients usually start asynchronous care at their convenience by simply filling out an online health questionnaire, as well as uploading photos if needed (such as for dermatology issues), which help detail their current symptoms. They receive a response from a virtual care doctor with a diagnosis and treatment plan via email or text message.

Hassle-free health care – anytime, anywhere

People enrolled in [Cigna HealthcareSM](#) medical benefit plans (either through their employer or the Affordable Care Act individual marketplace) can take advantage of the flexibility of virtual care services via [MD Live](#), which offers virtual urgent care, primary care (virtual wellness screenings and routine care), behavioral (therapy and psychiatry) and dermatology services. Virtual primary care and behavioral health appointments can be scheduled 24/7, with routine primary care appointments often available the same day and the average turnaround time for a new behavioral care appointment being five days. Urgent care visits are available on demand via phone or video. Dermatology services are provided via asynchronous messaging, with care providers responding within 24 hours.

MD Live doctors provide detailed reports of their virtual care sessions for patients to share with their in-person primary care doctor to ensure coordination and continuity of care.

In addition, MD Live has recently launched its [new E-Treatment option*](#) that provides asynchronous care for many common, non-emergent and low-acuity conditions such as cold, flu, allergies, eye or ear infections, or urinary tract infections. An MD Live doctor will review a patient's submitted online questionnaire and respond within a few hours with a recommended treatment plan and diagnosis, including prescriptions if medically necessary. The doctor may also refer patients to a real-time MD Live virtual visit or in-person services if they require a higher level of care.

“Having virtual appointments available anytime, including nights and weekends, as well as the E-Treatment option, makes MD Live particularly beneficial for people who have busy schedules or challenges getting to a doctor's office.” said Jennifer Rapp, president, Individual and Family Plans at Cigna Healthcare. “Whether they are parents of young children, employees who have returned to a 9-to-5 worksite, or gig workers whose hours can change from week to week, MD Live can help people prioritize their health without disrupting their day. MD Live is designed to provide convenient and simple access to a broad range of medical and behavioral health services while delivering the same high-quality care as seeing a health care provider in person.”

Rapp added that as technology continues to advance, people can expect even more convenience and flexibility from virtual care services in the future.

**E-Treatment is available in all U.S. states except: Kansas, Mississippi, New Mexico, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.*

1. Landro L. Seeing a Doctor Doesn't Have to Be So Frustrating. Wall Street Journal, March 25, 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/doctor-visits-appointments-frustration-1c88eb9a>

2. American Psychological Association. Psychologists reaching their limits as patients present with worsening symptoms year after year: 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2023-psychologist-reach-limits>
3. Smith LB, Karpman M, Gonzalez D, and Morriss S. More than One in Five Adults with Limited Public Transit Access Forgo Health Care Because of Transportation Barriers. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, April 26, 2023. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2023/04/more-than-one-in-five-adults-with-limited-public-transit-access-forgo-healthcare-because-of-transportation-barriers.html>
4. Health Resources and Services Administration. Health Workforce Shortage Areas. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas?tab=hpsaHeader>

CHC81424

[Standard Newsroom disclaimer]

All insurance policies and group benefit plans contain exclusions and limitations. For availability, costs and complete details of coverage, contact a licensed agent or Cigna Healthcare sales representative. Individual and family medical and dental insurance plans are insured by Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company (CHLIC), Cigna HealthCare of Arizona, Inc., Cigna HealthCare of Illinois, Inc., Cigna HealthCare of Georgia, Inc., Cigna HealthCare of North Carolina, Inc., Cigna HealthCare of South Carolina, Inc., and Cigna HealthCare of Texas, Inc. Group health insurance and health benefit plans are insured or administered by CHLIC, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (CGLIC), or their affiliates (see a listing of the legal entities that insure or administer group HMO, dental HMO, and other products or services in your state). Accidental Injury, Critical Illness, and Hospital Care plans or insurance policies are distributed exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of The Cigna Group, including Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company. The Cigna names, logos, and marks, including THE CIGNA GROUP and CIGNA HEALTHCARE are owned by Cigna Intellectual Property, Inc.