



***Internet Access in Palm Beach County Brief:
The Impact on Access to Health Care
April 2021***

(The following information was taken from the Quantum Foundation Health Equity Profile 2020.)

Why focus on internet access?

Telehealth (or telemedicine) has emerged as an essential component of healthcare during the COVID-19 crisis. In the field of health, experts see benefits and ongoing challenges of telehealth, benefits and challenges that will impact the health of patients in the years to come. According to the Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics: **'Internet connectivity, particularly access to broadband, is playing an increasingly important role in both healthcare and public health.** Telehealth — the use of telecommunications technologies to deliver healthcare, public health services, and health education from a distance — is revolutionizing the delivery of clinical care and health-related services in the United States and elsewhere. Telehealth is a promising approach to reduce health disparities by bringing specialized healthcare to communities where specialty care was previously unavailable, facilitating monitoring and follow-up care for chronic health conditions, and connecting providers in remote areas. Unfortunately, the rural and underserved populations who stand to benefit the most from telehealth approaches are also the least likely to have access to broadband or high-speed internet — a prerequisite to these promising approaches. Beyond access to health services, broadband access is important given its impact on other **social determinants of health**, including education and employment opportunities. Law plays an important role in facilitating the broadband access necessary for solutions in those communities currently without high-speed internet services.¹

Why is this important?

There is a correlation between income, education, and internet access. In this nation about half of low-income families lack internet access. This means families are not receiving equal access to knowledge, information, and learning critical to function in the 21st century digital environment. There are notable divides around educational advancement, employment opportunities, and participation in the larger community. Internet access provides a gateway that enable families to improve financial literacy, access health, education, and other innovations that improve the quality of life.

¹ Bauerly, McCord, Hulkower, Pepin. *Broadband Access as a Public Health Issue: The Role of Law in Expanding Broadband Access and Connecting Underserved Communities for Better Health Outcomes.* Journal of Law Med Ethics. 2019 Jun; 47(2 Suppl): 39–42.

The Growth of Telehealth During the Pandemic

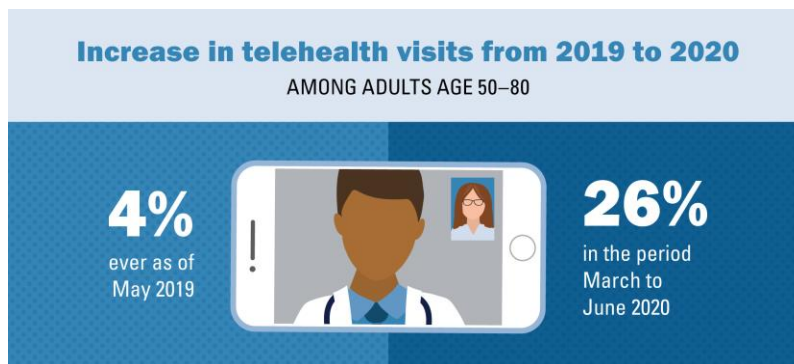
Prior to March 2020, telehealth claims in the United States grew at a very slow rate. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an abrupt spike in telehealth claims in spring 2020.

According to a 2020 Telehealth Impact: Claims Data Analysis study from the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition Telehealth Impact Study Work Group, using a set of monthly telehealth claims submitted by physicians in the State of Florida, we can see that the use of telehealth to deliver health care grew exponentially.

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| February 2020: 29,903 | April 2020: 694,455 |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|

This data comes from a large de-identified healthcare claims files provided by Change Healthcare representing over 50% of private insurance claims in the United States. A significant limitation is that it does not include the majority of Medicare and Medicaid indemnity claims.²

According to a University of Michigan National Poll,³ the shift to telehealth during the pandemic led many patients, including many older adults, to have appointments with their health care providers through telehealth visits (typically conducted by video or phone) rather than in-person. The poll showed that ‘the percentage of older adults who had ever participated in a telehealth visit rose sharply from 4% in May 2019 to 30% in June 2020. Of those surveyed in 2020, 6% reported having a telehealth visit prior to March 2020, while 26% reported having a telehealth visit in the period from March to June 2020.’



² Accessed on April 29, 2021 from: <https://c19hcc.org/telehealth/claims-analysis/>

³ Buis L, Singer D, Solway E, Kirch M, Kullgren J, Malani P. Telehealth Use Among Older Adults Before and During COVID-19. University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging. August 2020. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/156253>

Internet Access Across Palm Beach County

The percent of households with no internet access by Census Tract in Palm Beach County ranged from 0 - 66%. The median percent of households with no internet access was 11%. The top quartile of Census Tracts with a high percent of households with no internet access are those where between 20 - 66% of households reported no internet access.

To view an interactive map of the percent of households with no internet access by Census Tract, visit <https://plcy.mp/NYcYV7x>. (See also page 3.)

Table 1: Estimated Percent of Households with No Internet Access, by Census Tract, Palm Beach County, 2018

| City | Census Tract | Percent |
|-----------------|--------------|---------|
| Jupiter | 2.02 | 22% |
| Lake Park | 11.01 | 21% |
| | 13.01 | 21% |
| Riviera Beach | 12.00 | 31% |
| | 13.02 | 41% |
| | 14.03 | 39% |
| | 14.04 | 30% |
| | 15.00 | 28% |
| | 16.00 | 29% |
| West Palm Beach | 19.04 | 21% |
| | 18.01 | 39% |
| | 17.00 | 26% |
| | 22.00 | 45% |
| | 23.00 | 25% |
| | 21.00 | 30% |
| | 20.06 | 24% |
| | 36.00 | 21% |
| | 19.17 | 20% |
| 53.00 | 20% | |
| Lake Worth | 44.02 | 44% |
| | 51.01 | 48% |
| | 51.02 | 42% |
| | 57.01 | 20% |
| Boynton Beach | 57.02 | 32% |
| | 60.07 | 25% |
| | 67.00 | 23% |
| Delray Beach | 68.01 | 30% |
| | 68.02 | 30% |
| | 69.08 | 22% |
| | 56.01 | 27% |
| San Castle | 54.05 | 20% |
| Pam Beach | 55.02 | 27% |
| Lantana | 58.14 | 28% |
| Seminole Manor | 19.09 | 21% |
| Schall Circle | 29.00 | 27% |

| City | Census Tract | Percent |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Westgate | 30.00 | 20% |
| | 40.12 | 25% |
| Greenacres | 48.18 | 27% |
| | 42.02 | 30% |
| Palm Springs | 42.03 | 28% |
| | 80.01 | 45% |
| Glades Region | 80.02 | 51% |
| | 81.01 | 40% |
| | 82.01 | 66% |
| | 82.02 | 60% |
| | 82.03 | 47% |
| | 83.01 | 56% |
| | 83.02 | 44% |
| 6.00 | 27% | |
| Unincorporated Palm Beach County | 10.02 | 19% |
| | 19.10 | 37% |
| | 19.11 | 29% |
| | 19.12 | 36% |
| | 19.13 | 38% |
| | 40.09 | 28% |
| | 40.11 | 20% |
| | 40.13 | 46% |
| | 41.02 | 24% |
| | 46.02 | 27% |
| | 47.02 | 22% |
| | 48.17 | 29% |
| | 49.03 | 31% |
| | 58.07 | 20% |
| | 58.10 | 34% |
| | 59.33 | 20% |
| | 59.36 | 32% |
| 59.39 | 25% | |
| 59.40 | 27% | |
| 59.44 | 39% | |
| 59.56 | 20% | |
| 77.44 | 21% | |
| 79.32 | 33% | |

Source: PolicyMap, US Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
 Compiled by: Health Council of Southeast Florida, 2020

These findings are consistent with research by the Pew Research Center that racial minorities and rural residents are less likely to have the service at home. Furthermore, Pew also reported that the “homework gap” – or school-age children lacking the connectivity they need to complete school work at home – is more pronounced for Black, Hispanic, and lower-income households.⁴

⁴ Pew Research Center (2020, March 16). *As schools close due to the coronavirus, some U.S. students face a digital ‘homework gap.’* Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/16/as-schools-close-due-to-the-coronavirus-some-u-s-students-face-a-digital-homework-gap>

Estimated percent of households with no internet access, between 2014-2018.

Percent Households with No Internet Access

Year: 2014-2018

Shaded by: Census Tract, 2010

- Insufficient Data
- 5.7% or less
- 5.8% - 10.7%
- 10.8% - 19.4%
- 19.5% - 66.0%

Source: Census

