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How Will Last Year's Biggest Health Care Trends Evolve in 2022?

Last year, we shared the [top anticipated health care trends of 2021](#) amid a very uncertain time for the industry as a whole. Now, at the start of a new year, we explore where some of the newest health trends, such as telehealth and mental well-being programs, stand today, as well as how they could continue to evolve in 2022:

Telehealth is here to stay.

According to McKinsey research, telehealth stabilized at levels [38 times higher than the pre-pandemic baseline](#) in 2021, after previously peaking at a volume 78 times higher. Ongoing use of telehealth paired with increased funding for innovation show that telehealth is not only here to stay – it's improving as well.

While many challenges exist, experts suggest that long-term telehealth has the potential to widely improve health care access, especially for behavioral health and specialty care. Another innovation in telehealth is virtual-based health plans, which allow for members to access their PCPs virtually for convenience and ease; in fact, Harvard Pilgrim offers two [virtual-based health plan options](#), SimplyVirtualSM HMO and VirtualChoiceSM HMO, for those eligible. Improved quality of care coupled with care affordability are only some of the ways

that telehealth is shifting the health care landscape.

Ongoing engagement made easier with digital health solutions.

The pandemic put an emphasis on utilizing digital health platforms as a means to support employee well-being and emotional health. Throughout 2021, this movement toward prioritizing whole-person health was not only sustained, but became essential for [employee retention](#). Research shows that employees are seeking more of a tailored, personalized experience when it comes to digital tools. [Nearly a quarter of consumers](#) want to take a more active role in managing their health and desire digital tools that help them understand their health habits.

Behavioral health continues to be prioritized.

COVID-19 has shifted the conversation toward spotlighting workforce mental health, a concept that many employers were just beginning to grasp prior to the pandemic. The initial focus was on supporting employees through the effects of the pandemic, such as personal loss and mass trauma. In the coming year, the pressure is now on employers to make lasting [cultural shifts in the workplace](#), including destigmatizing mental health, emphasizing diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) and continuing to invest in robust benefits that support mental health.

A shift toward care delivery within the home.

As the boomer population rises in age, the demand for at-home health care and alternative care delivery models for older, at-risk individuals remains high. Beyond simply diagnosing and treating [common conditions](#), telehealth has made it possible to manage post-discharge care, chronic conditions and prescription refills from the comfort of home. Additional programs like MyHome care by Tufts Health Plan make it possible for patients to receive care through a combination of telehealth visits, in-home clinical visits and remote biometric monitoring. At a broader level, additional federal funding under the American Rescue Plan was made available to help states [expand Medicaid home and community-based services](#) for older adults, low-income families and individuals with disabilities. At this time, this increase is temporary and available through the end of March.

As the industry seeks alternative care models, challenges like widespread access and digital literacy remain a core concern – as well as an important component for the continued innovation of the health care system.

Addressing social conditions that impact health.

Addressing health care disparities was an area of emphasis throughout 2021. [A broad range of initiatives](#) was implemented at all levels to address pandemic impact, including providing food and housing support, stimulus payments to individuals, federal unemployment insurance payments and expanded child tax credit payments. Meanwhile, nationwide studies are being funded to [better understand social determinants of health](#) and how they affect health outcomes, including the use of AI and [machine learning to predict](#)

[and treat health outcomes](#) for wide-ranging populations.

Greater emphasis on care for caregivers.

Throughout 2021, the conversation around benefits for caregivers continued to be a primary focus. In particular, the spotlight focused on [working parents](#), whose needs and mindsets have drastically shifted after being physically, emotionally and financially impacted by the pandemic. In 2022, employers are under pressure to better accommodate the priorities of their employees outside of work such as caring for children and aging family members. This includes normalizing benefits, such as flexible working arrangements, hybrid/remote options, childcare reimbursements and strong behavioral health offerings to support mental health.