

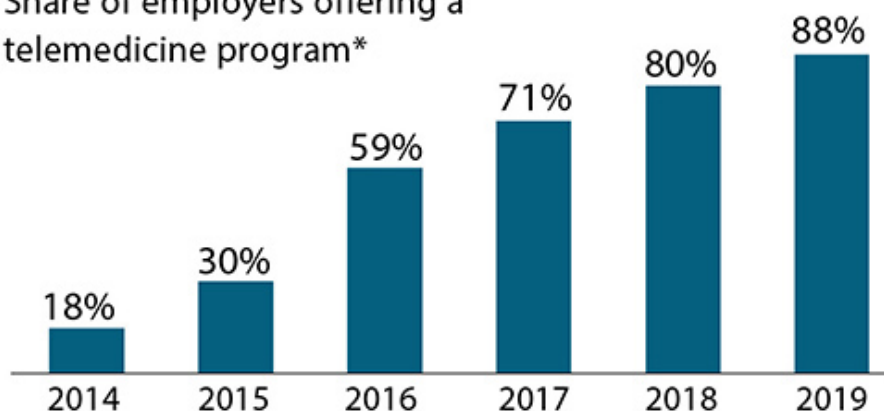
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## Telemedicine: The Virtual Doctor Will See You Now

Widespread smartphone use, loosening regulations, and employers seeking health cost savings are three trends that were driving the rapid expansion of telemedicine. And that was before social distancing guidelines to help control the spread of COVID-19 made the availability of remote medical care more vital than anyone anticipated.

### Employer Enthusiasm

Share of employers offering a telemedicine program\*



\*Employers with 500+ employees

Source: Mercer National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans 2019



Telemedicine offers a way for patients to interact with doctors or nurses through a website or mobile app using a secure audio or video connection. Patients have immediate access to advice and treatment any time of the day or night, while avoiding unnecessary and costly emergency room visits. And health providers have the ability to bill for consultations and other services provided from a distance.

Telemedicine can be used to treat minor health problems such as allergies and rashes, or for an urgent condition such as a high fever. It also makes it easier to access therapy for mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. In other cases, doctors can monitor the vital signs of health patients with chronic conditions remotely, or follow up with patients after a hospital discharge. Telemedicine can also fill gaps in the availability of specialty care, especially in rural areas.

In 2019, nearly nine out of 10 large employers (with 500 or more employees) offered telemedicine programs in their benefit packages, but many workers had not tried them out. Only 9% of eligible employees utilized telemedicine

services in 2018 (the most recent year for which data is available), even though virtual consultations often have lower copays and are generally less expensive than in-person office visits, especially for those with high deductibles.<sup>1</sup>

If your health plan includes telemedicine services, you might take a closer look at the details, download the app, and/or register for an online account. This way, you'll be ready to log in quickly the next time your family faces a medical problem.

1) Mercer National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans 2019

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