

COMMENTARY BY COMPETISCAN:

The Continued Importance of Telemedicine and Mental Health Services

By Scott Hoffman, AVP Insights

The United States recently marked five years since officials declared a national emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting shutdown upended health care across the country. With people unable to visit their doctors or medical facilities/offices for routine medical care, telehealth options took on an increased importance. Likewise, the need for mental health services rose with so many people experiencing loss and isolation throughout the pandemic.

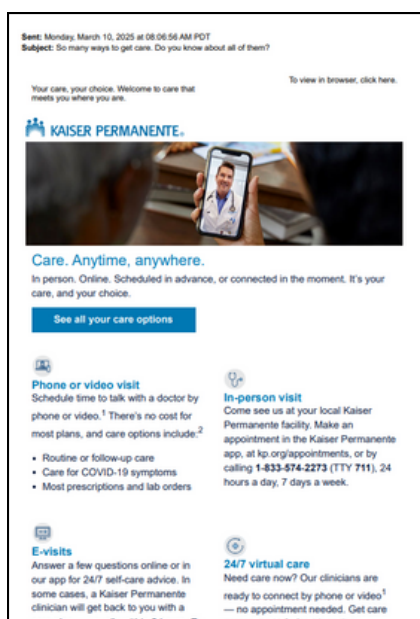
In this edition of Competiscan's ongoing Commentary series, our team explores the evolution of telehealth and mental health services and highlights recent innovative benefits and marketing approaches in each space.



In the years since the pandemic, carriers have sought to emphasize telehealth as a valuable component of care delivery to ensure that plan members consider the many options available for immediate care.

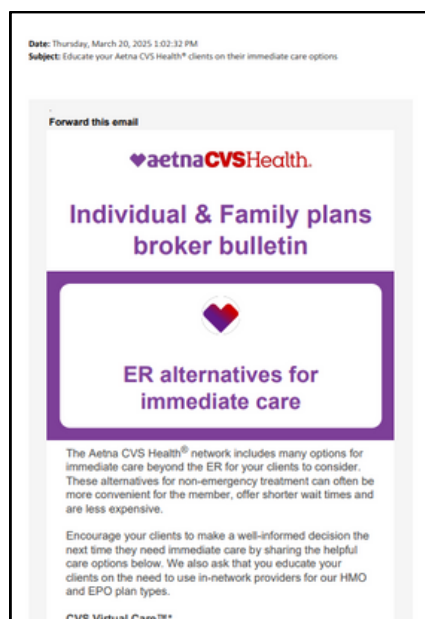
With physical distancing measures in place, telehealth emerged as a critical solution for maintaining access to healthcare services. While telehealth existed prior to 2020, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual care across various medical fields as people were unable to visit doctors for routine medical care.

In 2025 carriers have positioned their programs towards convenience and choice. A key aspect of this has been steering members away from an unnecessary emergency room visit. The Kaiser Permanente and Aetna emails featured here each discuss the different options available and encourage members to leverage virtual or telehealth services for minor illnesses or consultations.



Kaiser Permanente Member Email

"In person. Online. Scheduled in advance, or connected in the moment. It's your care, and your choice." – Kaiser Permanente



Aetna Producer Email

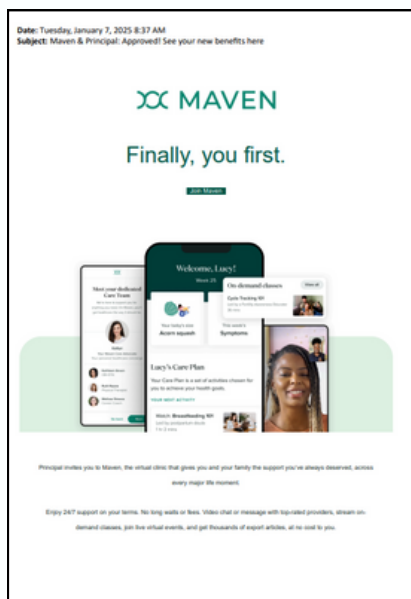
Health plans and vendors sought to actively promote their digital health solutions as more than just a quick talk with a medical professional.

Beyond simply providing routine medical care, telehealth has evolved to include services such as virtual second opinions, maternity care and treatment for chronic illnesses. Maven and Progyny have been key players in virtual maternity care and have partnered with a variety of carriers, while 2ndMD has emerged as a value-added benefit offered to plan members interested in having access to second opinions and making a more informed care decision.

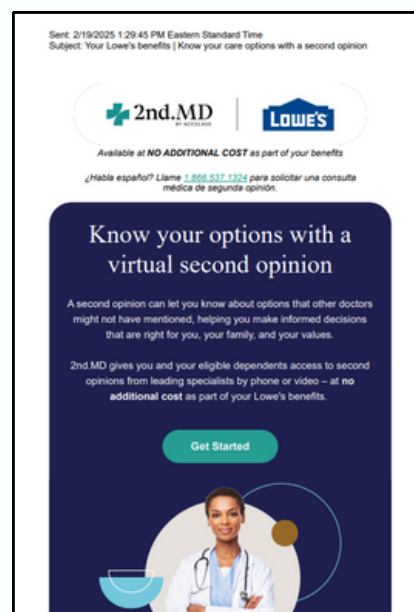


Recent Telehealth Innovations include:

- Virtual Second Opinions
- Maternity Care
- Treatment for Chronic Illnesses



Principal invites you to Maven, the virtual clinic that gives you and your family the support you've always deserved, across every major life moment. – Maven/Principal



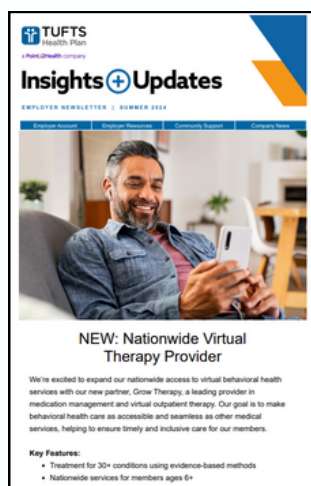
A second opinion can let you know about options that other doctors might not have mentioned, helping you make informed decisions that are right for you, your family, and your values. – 2ndMD Email

Telehealth has been used to overcome barriers for individuals seeking mental health support.

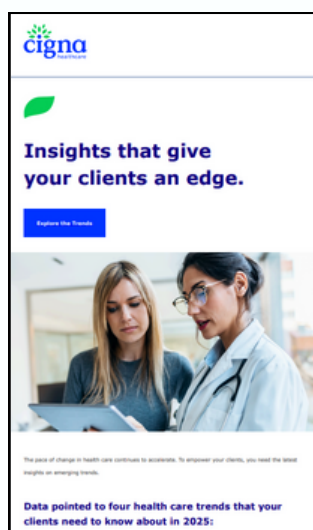
The mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was significant, with increased rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health challenges. Social isolation, economic uncertainty, and fear of illness contributed to heightened levels of distress across the population.

Telehealth played a key role in providing mental health services during this time, as many therapists, counselors, and psychiatrists shifted to virtual platforms to continue offering care.

Telehealth has facilitated greater access to mental health support for individuals who might otherwise have faced barriers to in-person treatment and carriers and vendors have sought to make mental health services as accessible as other health services and benefits. A key area of improvement has been the scheduling process, a pain point for consumers due to increased demand. Recent communications from Tufts Health Plan and Cigna have each highlighted targeted improvements related to online scheduling of therapy appointments to ensure more timely care.



*Tufts Health Plan
Employer Newsletter*



Cigna Producer Email

Along with improving the scheduling process, Cigna emphasized the importance of members having multiple sessions with a therapist and highlighted the per member savings associated with timely treatment.



Conclusion: Telehealth and mental health services are now integral aspects of health insurance offerings.

The pandemic has left a lasting impact on both telehealth and mental health services in the United States. Telehealth will remain a staple in the United States healthcare system, with continued efforts to improve accessibility, security, and integration into traditional care models. The crisis also highlighted the need for expanded mental health services and better support systems to address the long-term psychological effects of the pandemic.

The innovations Competiscan has observed from carriers and vendors over the past five years included a focus on consumer choice, affordability, and access to specialized services like maternity care and second opinions. The transformation we have seen within this space is just the beginning as telehealth has become a critical pillar of care options.

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Keep in Touch:

312.488.1810

research@competiscan.com

www.competiscan.com

