

Penta Policy Insiders

The Future of Telemedicine

What Policymakers Are Saying

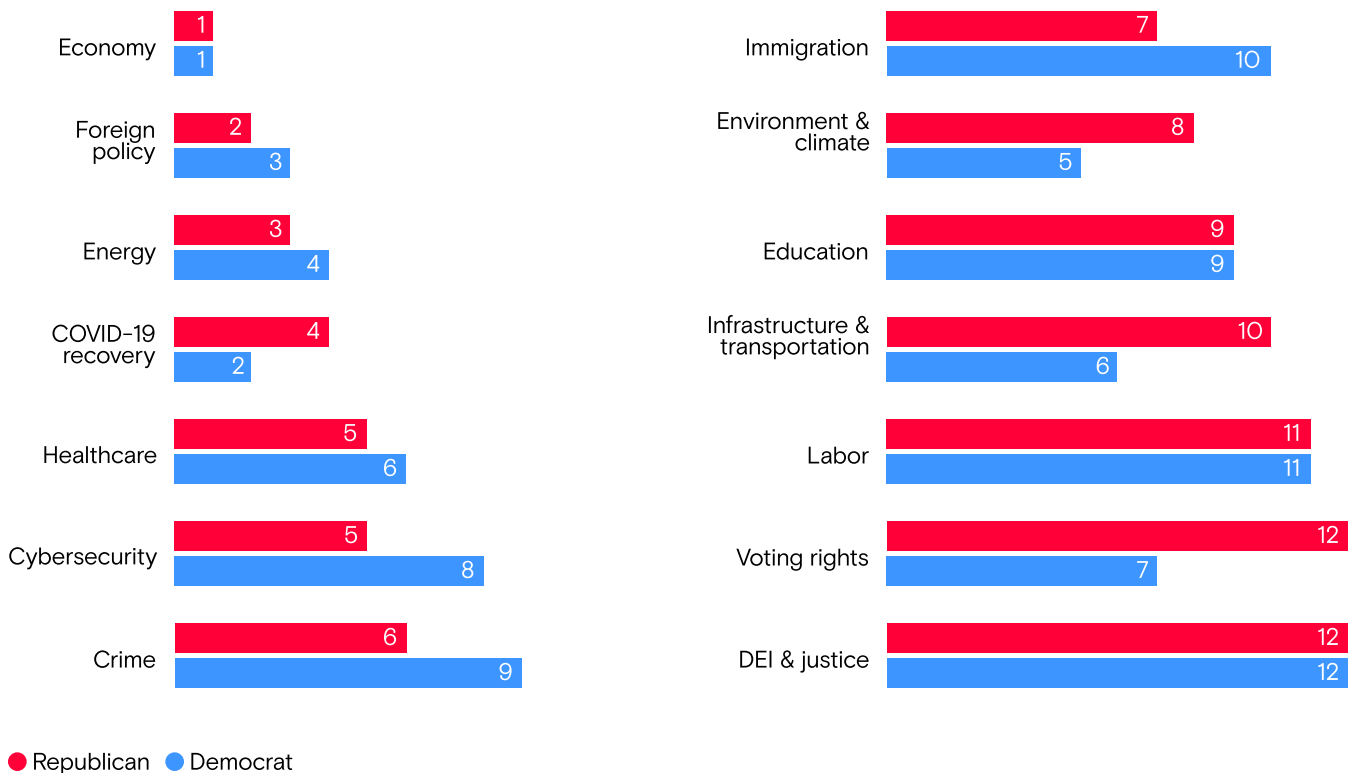
Introduction

The use of telemedicine accelerated exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic, representing 13 percent of outpatient visits between March and August of 2020.¹ A recent study depicts a 766 percent increase in the usage of telemedicine in the first three months of the pandemic, going from 0.3 percent of all interactions from March to June 2019 to almost 24 percent of all interactions in the same period.² By allowing both doctors and patients more flexibility when it comes to out-of-office care, telehealth has opened the door to a more accessible means of healthcare that is expected to continue to be a prominent tool for years to come. In fact, by 2025, more than 43 percent of patients in the U.S. are expected to use telehealth services to manage their health.³

Given this ongoing emphasis on telemedicine and healthcare, especially in light of the pandemic, it is unsurprising that these issues are top of mind for policymakers. Almost a quarter of policymakers in 2022 said that healthcare is an area they plan on spending time working on, reinforcing the steady focus on this arena. In fact, telemedicine is particularly relevant now, as the federal COVID Public Health Emergency (PHE), which temporarily expanded the use of telehealth services, recently ended.⁴ The expiration of the declaration has made policy leaders increasingly interested in what access to telemedicine looks like in their communities within the post-pandemic landscape. Additionally, with the introduction of bipartisan bills such as the Telehealth Expansion Act and the Telehealth Benefit Expansion for Workers Act in 2023, it's clear that telehealth policy will continue to be top-of-mind for policymakers.^{5,6}

Policymakers rank healthcare as a top priority

Ranked policy priority by party



What policymakers are saying

Our data reveals telemedicine to be a bipartisan interest, with Republicans specifically highlighting telehealth as a way to improve access to rural communities. Policy leaders additionally note that the growing prevalence of telemedicine also reinforces the need to provide stable high-speed broadband access in such areas across the country.

Policymakers say that telehealth is convenient, accessible, and cost-effective.



If it's a non-acute ailment, why not just be able to telehealth it and say, "I have a runny nose, a little bit of a scratch in the back of my throat." Why go into a germ-infested doctor's office to get diagnosed with something that's easily diagnosable just through conversation? So I'm a huge proponent of telehealth.

Executive Director, Private, N/A



I think telehealth policies will begin to be front and center because the Pandemic demonstrated in a 24-month period just how, one, successful it can be and two, more cost-effective, and three, the issue with telehealth will also relate to the Bipartisan infrastructure package, where they will now be able to provide high-speed broadband in rural communities.

Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives, D



I think telehealth is something that people are embracing. They don't want to have to drive to go see their doctor. They can do a Zoom visit. They'd rather do that in five minutes, and I think the doctor can see a higher volume of patients with telehealth visits. So it's affecting the business model as well as allowing doctors to see more patients. That I think, is something that we should embrace because that's technology operating at its finest.

Former Legislative Staffer, U.S. Congress, R

Policymakers emphasize that telehealth is a priority in rural communities, even in a post-COVID world.



Telehealth is a big [priority], people being able to access doctors when they need them and keeping that around and keeping that available to people in rural areas, even post-COVID.

Former Legislative Staffer, U.S. Congress, R



We have a buffet of different sorts of telehealth flexibilities and options and ways to deliver it... How do you prevent fraud and abuse without clamping down too hard and restricting access? From the Republican side, rural issues are huge, and so telehealth is a great way to break that barrier.

Former Legislative Staffer, U.S. Congress, R

Policy staff say telemedicine can be a way to limit the number of visits to the doctor's office and still provide care to those that need it most.



There are ways that you can limit the number of visits and time it takes from the doctor, but also focus on the people that need the real care. I think [telemedicine] can be clever, and innovative about that. **With technology,** that would be helpful.

Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Senate, D



Conclusion

The increased emphasis on healthcare during the COVID pandemic spotlighted the accessibility and convenience of telehealth services, and policymakers have taken note. Policy leaders across the country have a largely bipartisan interest in telemedicine, with Republicans specifically seeing it as a way to increase access to healthcare in underinvested communities across the country. Across aisles, policymakers also note that the growing usage of telehealth services emphasizes the need for access to high-speed broadband throughout the United States. As telemedicine continues to become widely adopted, our research suggests that it will continue to be a priority for policymakers when it comes to healthcare policy, especially with the introduction of several telehealth-focused legislation this year.

About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

Credits

Content Associate
Maddie Markenson

Senior Content Associate
Kinda Ahmed

Associate Director, Government Insights & Research Products
Natalie Bahmanyar

Director, Research
Sehare Hemani

Associate Director, Quantitative Research
Mackai Tapleshay

Chief Research Officer
Michael Griffin

President
Michael Gottlieb

Citations

- <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/telehealth-has-played-an-outsized-role-meeting-mental-health-needs-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9035352/>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare/our-insights/from-facility-to-home-how-healthcare-could-shift-by-2025>
- <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/telehealth-policy/policy-changes-after-the-covid-19-public-health-emergency>
- <https://delbene.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3320#:~:text=The%20Telehealth%20Benefit%20Expansion%20for,workers%2C%20to%20access%20telehealth%20benefits.>
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1843/text>

A Note on Use of These Materials

This document has been prepared by, and comprises valuable proprietary information belonging to Penta. It is intended for educational purposes only.

Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database retrieval system without the prior written permission of Penta. The use of copyrighted materials and/or images belonging to unrelated parties and reproduced herein is permitted pursuant to license and/or 17 USC § 107.

Legal Caveat

Penta has worked to ensure the accuracy of the information it provides in this report. This report relies upon data obtained from many sources, however, and Penta is not able to guarantee the accuracy of the information or analysis contained in these materials. Furthermore, Penta is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or any other professional services. Penta specifically disclaims liability for any damages, claims or losses that may arise from a) any errors or omissions in these materials, whether caused by Penta or its sources, or b) reliance upon any recommendation made by Penta.

Confidentiality: All participation in our research is confidential and not for attribution.
