

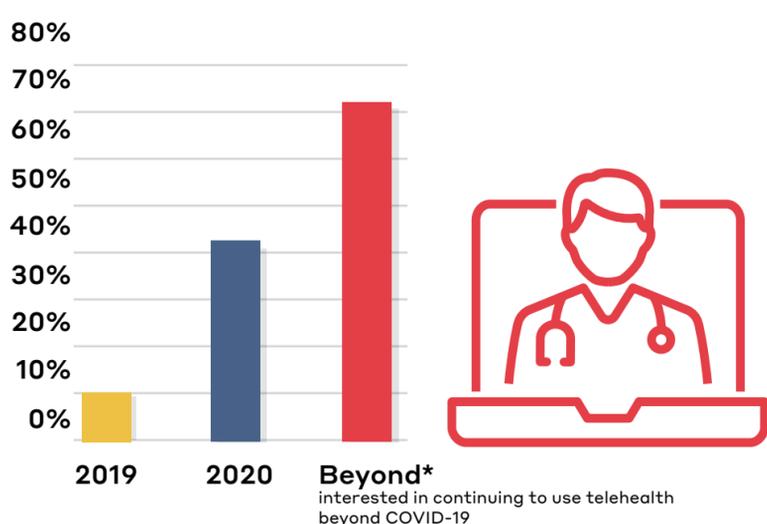
# The Case for Expanding Telehealth Services



In response to COVID-19, Congress and the administration rapidly expanded the use of telehealth services to ensure continued access to care during the pandemic. Yet as the public health emergency is extended, health care providers and patients remain uncertain about the future of this important tool. BPC's Rural Health Task Force supports making these temporary telehealth regulatory changes permanent and encourages new investments in broadband.

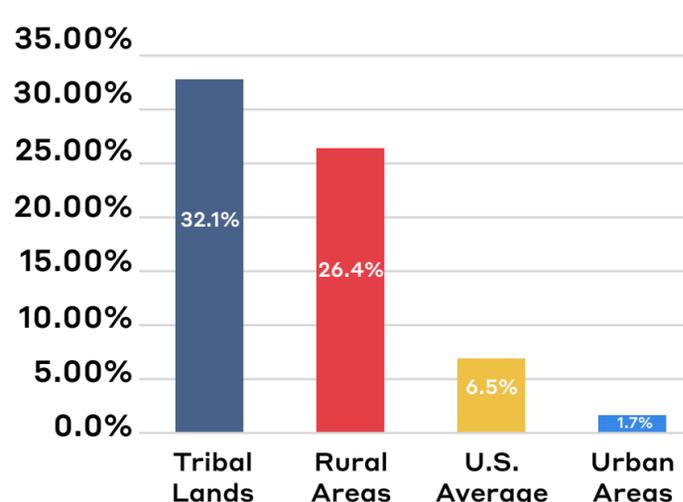
## Telehealth Use in 2019, 2020 and Beyond

The percentage of consumers using telehealth is skyrocketing due to recent policy changes removing barriers. Consumers support the continued use of telehealth beyond the pandemic.<sup>i</sup>



## Broadband Expansion is an Integral Part of Expanding Telehealth Services

In 2017, 32.1% of tribal lands and 26.4% of rural areas lacked access to broadband, compared to only 1.7% in urban areas and 6.5% in the U.S. as a whole.<sup>ii</sup>



## The Need for Telehealth Extends Beyond COVID-19

### People in rural areas experience:

- Greater risk of premature death from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory disease; higher rates of diabetes; and elevated levels of maternal and infant mortality.<sup>iii</sup>
- Higher reliance on telestroke services for life-saving treatments during a stroke
- Little to no access to specialists like OBGYNs, neurologists, and psychologists
- Longer distances to travel when seeking health care services
- More difficulty recruiting and retaining a sufficient health care workforce
- Lower likelihood of being connected to broadband or wireless telecom services

## What Needs To Be Done

### BPC's Rural Health Task Force Recommendations:

- Permanently extend the regulatory and payment changes that have enabled the expansion of telehealth services during the public health emergency. These changes include the following BPC recommendations:
  - Expand telehealth to include non-face-to-face, or asynchronous, services
  - Allow the patient's home to serve as the originating site for virtual visits
  - Allow patients to use telephones for telehealth services
  - Give providers flexibilities around HIPAA when acting in good faith on live-video visits
  - Allow both Rural Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers to serve as distant sites, allowing them to provide telehealth services
- Significantly invest in broadband infrastructure and continue to prioritize connecting rural areas with broadband through anchor institutions and direct-to-home services.
- Ensure effective implementation of the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act.
- Allow providers to use telehealth services across state lines to help meet the health care needs of vulnerable populations, especially those in rural communities.
- Direct the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, or ONC, to prioritize rural-specific training curricula for the health IT workforce.

<sup>i</sup> McKinsey COVID-19 Consumer Survey, April 27, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> FCC 2019 Broadband Deployment Report

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/factsheets/telehealth-in-rural-communities.htm>