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# The Vital Role of Women in Telehealth: Enhancing Access, Equity, and Quality of Care

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## Abstract

Telehealth has become a revolutionary instrument in contemporary healthcare, enhancing accessibility, efficiency, and patient outcomes. Women have been essential in this digital change, serving as healthcare professionals, carers, inventors, and policymakers. Their participation has improved healthcare accessible, especially for marginalised people, while also guaranteeing the provision of patient-centered and high-quality care. This paper explores the role of women in telehealth, highlighting their contributions, challenges, and opportunities. Despite challenges such as gender inequities in leadership and the digital gap, focused initiatives can enable women to propel advancements in telehealth. By identifying and addressing these obstacles, women can establish a more inclusive and efficient telehealth environment. The involvement of women in telehealth is crucial for improving access, equity, and the quality of treatment.

**Keywords:** Telehealth; Women; Healthcare practitioners; Digital health; Treatment

## Introduction

Telehealth has become an essential element of contemporary healthcare, facilitating remote access to medical services, enhancing health outcomes, and reducing healthcare inequities. Women, as the predominant segment of healthcare professionals and carers, are essential to the telehealth ecosystem. The tremendous development of telehealth has transformed healthcare delivery, enhancing accessibility, efficiency, and patient-centricity of medical services. As technology increasingly connects health care provider and patients, women have become essential contributors to this digital evolution. Women are influencing the future of telehealth by improving access, equity, and the overall quality of treatment, encompassing frontline healthcare professionals, policymakers, carers, and patients. The global telehealth market is growing rapidly, with a projected value of over \$791 billion by 2032 [1]. According to National Center for health statistics, (2021) telehealth services have experienced significant growth globally, with women representing a substantial portion of users [2,3]. In the United States, data from 2021 indicates that 42.0% of women utilized telemedicine services in the past year, surpassing the 31.7% usage rate among men [4,5]. Statista [6] states that Indian telehealth market projected to reach \$5.4 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 31%.

## Women as Telehealth Providers

Women are integral to telehealth as healthcare practitioners, especially in disciplines such as medicine, nursing, and mental health services. Women dominate in the nursing profession, with several nurse practitioners pioneering telehealth initiatives, delivering general and speciality care to patients remotely. Female physicians play a crucial role in virtual consultations, delivering accessible and patient-centered treatment to many groups. Their

communication abilities, empathy, and comprehensive treatment approach render them very suitable for remote healthcare delivery. Their contributions have facilitated the closure of essential care disparities, especially for women and marginalised groups who encounter obstacles in obtaining conventional in-person treatment.

### Women as Telehealth Consumers

Women constitute a significant demographic of telehealth service users, frequently overseeing healthcare for both themselves and their family. Telehealth has markedly enhanced access to maternal health, reproductive care, and chronic illness management, particularly for those in rural and underserved regions. Virtual consultations provide flexibility, enabling women to obtain medical advice while managing job and caregiving duties. Digital health platforms empower women by giving them greater control over their healthcare decisions and medical records. As digital literacy increases, more women are adopting telehealth solutions for their routine medical needs. However, constraints such as internet accessibility, cost, and digital literacy continue to hinder fair telehealth implementation. Mitigating these issues by gender-inclusive legislation and enhanced infrastructure can significantly improve healthcare access and quality for women globally.

### Types of Telehealth Services

There are various types of telehealth services available including:

- a. **Live video conferencing:** facilitates real-time video consultations between patients and physicians.
- b. **Asynchronous video (store-and-forward):** permits patients to transmit their health records and obtain consultations from physicians remotely.
- c. **Remote patient monitoring (RPM):** facilitates healthcare providers in overseeing patients' vital signs and health conditions from a distance.
- d. **Mobile health (mHealth):** employs mobile devices and health-oriented applications to deliver healthcare services and assistance.

### Benefits of Telehealth for Women

- a. **Enhanced accessibility:** Improves healthcare availability for women in rural and marginalised regions.
- b. **Convenience and flexibility:** Enables women to consult physicians without interfering with professional or family obligations.
- c. **Mitigated healthcare disparities:** Addresses inequities in healthcare for women from various racial and ethnic origins.
- d. **Enhanced maternal, reproductive, and mental health assistance:** Virtual care facilitates prompt prenatal, postpartum, and reproductive health treatments, in addition to offering accessible counselling for anxiety, depression, and stress.

e. **Efficient management of chronic diseases and preventive care:** Women can more effectively manage problems such as diabetes, hypertension, and autoimmune disorders, hence decreasing hospital visits, cost reduction, and facilitating early intervention.

f. **Privacy, comfort, and empowerment:** Secure digital platforms enable women to get confidential medical treatment for sensitive matters such as sexual health and domestic abuse, while affording them increased autonomy over health-related decisions.

### Challenges and Opportunities in Telehealth for Women

- a. **Addressing healthcare disparities:** Although telehealth enhances accessibility, it may exacerbate inequities if digital literacy, language obstacles, or internet availability are not adequately addressed.
- b. **Ensuring access and affordability:** Economical and inclusive telehealth services are crucial for women, particularly those from low-income or marginalised backgrounds.
- c. **Supporting women in telehealth leadership:** Promoting women's leadership in telehealth may foster innovation, enhance policy, and guarantee gender-sensitive healthcare solutions.
- d. **Data privacy and security concerns:** Safeguarding women's health information from cyber threats and providing confidential consultations are essential for maintaining confidence in telehealth services.
- e. **Enhancing digital literacy and awareness:** Numerous women, especially in rural regions, lack the understanding or technical proficiency to use telehealth effectively, underscoring the necessity for training initiatives and community engagement.

### Conclusion

Women are integral to telehealth, and their involvement is crucial for improving access, equity, and quality of treatment. Women have a significant role in influencing the telehealth sector as providers, customers, and leaders. Confronting the problems and possibilities presented in this study can facilitate the alignment of telehealth services with the distinct needs and preferences of women.

### Recommendations

- a. **Increase investment in telehealth infrastructure:** It is essential to invest in a robust telehealth infrastructure, encompassing the expansion of broadband networks and the enhancement of digital health technology.
- b. **Develop women-centered telehealth services:** Telehealth services must be tailored and implemented to address the distinct requirements and preferences of women.

**c. Support women in telehealth leadership:** Women must be supported and encouraged to assume leadership positions in telehealth, fostering innovation and policy advancement.

**d. Integrate telehealth into mainstream healthcare:** Governments and healthcare providers must collaborate to assimilate telehealth inside traditional healthcare systems for uninterrupted patient care.

**e. Develop AI-driven personalized care models:** Employ artificial intelligence and machine learning to deliver personalised healthcare solutions derived from individual health data.

**f. Increase public awareness and engagement:** Implement awareness programs that emphasise the advantages of telehealth for women while dispelling misunderstandings.

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