Definitive guide to purchasing a telemedicine platform

A step-by-step guide to selecting the right telemedicine solution for your organization.

If you plan to add telemedicine capabilities to your suite of medical offerings, you aren't alone. Telemedicine is a critical component of the increasingly consumer-focused healthcare landscape. According to the American Telemedicine Association's (ATA) recent Telemedicine Executive Leadership Survey, 88 % of respondents planned to invest in telehealth technology. And research firm SGP, found that over half of surveyed healthcare executives have already implemented telemedicine solutions at their organization.

Both patients and physicians are embracing the flexibility of remote telemedicine solutions. Physicians and other providers clearly see the potential of secure, HIPAA-compliant video conferencing to help better manage their workloads and improve convenient patient care.

1. https://www.healthcare-informatics.com/news-item/telemedicine/survey-83-percent-healthcare-executive-leaders-plan-invest-telehealth-2017
2. http://go.sage-growth.com/defining-telemedicine

The Urgent Need for Telemedicine

Telemedicine systems help healthcare organizations increase patient convenience, streamline scheduling, increase revenue, and reduce healthcare costs — but even with those benefits, many providers may feel reluctant to take the plunge into telemedicine.

That's understandable — adopting a new technology often requires time, effort, and up-front investment. In some cases, this technology can even be seen as a potential obstacle to treatment. Many providers' experiences with the transition to electronic medical record (EMR) and practice management systems has left them frustrated at time spent on data entry, duplicate work, and navigating regulatory requirements.

However, a well-designed telemedicine solution can actually improve the treatment experience by making it easier for doctors to see more patients in less time, eliminate unnecessary office visits, and improve care plan compliance through more convenient follow-up contacts. Patients are steadily embracing this approach. A recent survey from Nemours Children's Health System found that 64% of parents were interested in using telemedicine for their children – an appealing option for busy families to connect with doctors for common ailments.[3] Of those that had already used virtual care, 80% said convenience was the primary benefit over in-person visits.

Most major insurance carriers and some larger employers now provide access directly to consumer-focused telemedicine services. The 2017 Mercer National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans found that 71% of large employers offer medical coverage for telemedicine, a rapid 59% increase from the previous year.[4]

64% of parents were interested in using telemedicine for their children.	**80% said convenience** was the primary benefit over in-person visits.

Why Telemedicine?

The spread of direct-to-consumer telemedicine is building access and demand for virtual care. Which means that many patients are using these systems rather than visiting their own physicians. That represents a competitive threat to brick and mortar practices and your physician-patient relationships. Providers who do not offer telemedicine may find that these online services are poaching their patients.

In addition to keeping your company competitive, adopting telemedicine comes with legislative and regulatory incentives. Telemedicine can help healthcare providers meet the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI) Triple Aim framework goals of improving the patient experience and population health, while reducing the cost per capital of healthcare.

The new Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act has introduced a Merit-Based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) that uses performance data as a basis to adjust payments to providers. Providers are evaluated on quality, improvement activities, advancing care information, and cost; telemedicine and remote patient monitoring technology can help providers improve performance scores — and reimbursements.

Telemedicine can help providers meet the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI) Triple Aim framework goals:	• IMPROVING THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE • POPULATION HEALTH • REDUCING THE COST OF HEALTHCARE

3. https://www.nemours.org/about/mediaroom/press/dv/majority-of-parents-plan-to-use-telemedicine.html
4. https://www.mercer.com/newsroom/mercer-national-health-survey-employers-finding-new-ways-to-hold-the-line-on-health-benefit-cost-growth.html

Finding Your Perfect Telehealth Match

So how do you find the right telehealth solution for your organization? Whether you are a small medical practice or a large hospital system, finding the right telemedicine vendor is crucial to launching a successful telehealth program. Here are a few key steps to choosing the right vendor:

- Define Your Telemedicine Goals
- Establish Your Telemedicine Use Case
- Talk with Staff
- Begin the Search
- Evaluate Telemedicine Vendors
- Choose a Winner

Step One: Define Your Telehealth Goals

As with any big project, setting your goals is a good place to start. This step is critical to ensure the success of your initiative. What do you want to accomplish with telemedicine? These goals will vary by practice type and in some cases, by geography. For instance, a small, single practitioner practice in a rural area, likely has different goals than a large hospital system in an urban center.

Here are a few common goals among healthcare providers adopting telemedicine solutions:

- Increase revenue
- Improve accessibility to care
- Improve patient outcomes
- Reduce hospital readmissions
- Stop losing patients to retail clinics/urgent care/ER (unnecessary visits)
- Improve patient satisfaction
- Add value to your subscription model
- Gain a competitive edge
- Attract new patients
- Improve your chronic care program

What do you want to accomplish with telemedicine?

As part of this process, identify specific challenges or pain points that you need to solve. Are you losing patients to other providers or other types of competitive services or facilities? Do you need to add value to your concierge-care model? Are you having trouble with over-scheduling or too many no-shows? Do you have patients with chronic illnesses in rural areas, where travel to an office/hospital might be challenging? Is there some other segment of your patient population that is particularly challenged with keeping their appointments?

Once you've identified pain points, establish whether having a video conferencing or other remote option can address them. Think through how telemedicine could remedy this issue for both your patients and staff.

You may find that you can identify more than one telemedicine goal, but keep in mind one primary objective to help focus your search.

Telemedicine Provides Flexibility

Ohio psychiatrist Dr. Rebecca Cirino opened a completely online, virtual clinic, allowing her to work from home and spend more time with her children. In her first year of operation using an eVisit telemedicine solution, she completed more than 550 visits , earned nearly $48,000 and achieved better work/life balance.

Step Two: Establish a Use Case

Keeping your primary objective in mind, outline your specific telemedicine use case. How can you use the technology to achieve your goal?

Here are a few factors that can help you identify the right use case.

Type of Telemedicine

While the most common form of telemedicine these days is live video, but there are other ways to deliver remote care. Which type is the right fit for accomplishing your goal?

Live Video: See and hear the patient in real time via a secure videoconferencing technology. These encounters provide the most "office-like" scenario, with two-way interactions. Live video is also reimbursable under most medical plans that offer telemedicine coverage.

Store-and-Forward: Securely transmit patient medical data from one location to another (between patient and provider, or provider to provider). While this method is useful for document/record transfers, it is typically not considered part of a reimbursable visit by insurance carriers.

Remote Patient Monitoring: Monitor patient medical data and recovery from a separate location, usually while the patient is at home or recently discharged from the hospital. These solutions usually require monitoring devices with an Internet connection.

mHealth: Use a range of mobile medical devices and apps to improve patient care and engagement. Patients may use phone apps or mobile fitness trackers to record data (such as compliance with a physician-recommended exercise regime, or blood sugar levels) and then share it with their provider.

Target Patient Population

Are there specific patients you want to target with telehealth? While you might eventually want to roll out telehealth to your entire patient population, it is often good to start with a specific patient pool.

Remote/Rural Patients: Rural counties in many states are facing a crisis when it comes to availability of primary care physicians and specialists alike. Telemedicine can help the few practices serving these populations provide access to patients who may be dozens (or even hundreds) of miles away from the nearest provider. Make sure to consider patient access to a reliable internet connection in these areas.

Patients with Chronic Conditions: For patients with ongoing medical issues, keeping multiple appointments each year just to obtain prescription refills or check in with the doctor can be inconvenient, time consuming, and exhausting. In some cases, patients eventually start skipping these visits, which can have a negative impact on their health. Telemedicine offers a simple solution to reduce no-shows, while improving care plan compliance and giving providers a more convenient way to stay on top of care for these patients.

> **71%** of healthcare providers use telehealth solutions[5]
>
> **71%** Patients use remote patient monitoring[6]
>
> **31%** of organizations are using video-based telehealth[7]

Older Patients: These patients (and other patients with mobility challenges) may find it difficult to keep their office appointments, either because the visits are physically taxing or they may no longer have a driver's license. Telemedicine can make these encounters safer and less challenging.

You may hesitate to try telemedicine with older patients, but the reality is that technology adoption among seniors has grown rapidly. A Pew Research Center survey found that approximately 67% of seniors use the Internet and about one-third own a tablet.[8] If they are having FaceTime or Skype conversations with their grandchildren, they can most likely navigate a telemedicine platform.

5. https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/71-of-healthcare-providers-use-telehealth-telemedicine-tools
6. https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/7.1m-patients-use-remote-monitoring-connected-medical-devices
7. https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/providers-like-virtual-care-but-sustainability-issues-linger
8. http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/17/technology-use-among-seniors/

Telemedicine Can Improve Chronic Care

When Florida Hospital, adopted its eCare telemedicine platform, designed by eVisit, they initially focused on minor conditions. As they broaden the scope of their remote offerings, they have begun to expand to help manage chronic diseases. This provides more recurrent access to patients outside the hospital, and increases convenience for patients who have to make frequent appointments. "We just keeping seeing an upward trend with eCare," says project manager Tyler Brown. "And now we have more access to patients who don't want to undergo the inconvenience of visiting a facility."

Medical Services

Now that you've identified the patients you want to serve, what medical services will you provide via the telemedicine platform?

You may initially want to limit the types of services available for more manageable deployment. It is also easier to schedule these remote visits if you know what will be discussed and how long the encounter is likely to take.

Many organizations find ease in offering the following services:

- Lab results
- Initial consultations
- After-hours services
- Urgent calls
- Simple follow-ups or check-ins

Step Three: Talk with Your Staff

Adding telemedicine to your suite of offerings will affect your entire organization — from changes to scheduling and record keeping to how you provide treatment and medication refills.

Think through how the telehealth solution will affect your staff, and bring them into the conversation early.

Think through how the telehealth solution will affect your staff, and bring them into the conversation early.

Involving one or more senior or key staff members to help with the evaluation will make a huge difference as you begin to implement the program into your office. This person's input will be invaluable to your administrative staff.

Talking to your staff will also help uncover potential stumbling blocks in deployment, as well as use cases you might not have thought of on your own. As you begin to look for a solution, consider:

- Who will use the telemedicine system and who will require training?
- How will telemedicine affect your scheduling process?
- How will the system affect work/life balance for you and your staff?
- How technologically savvy are your staff members? Can they adapt easily to the change?
- Will the system change your office hours? Some providers may only use telemedicine after hours, but some dedicate part or all of an entire day to these encounters. Will support staff have that day off?

Ask staff which features they think are most important, and if they think the software is missing anything crucial.

Keep the rest of your staff informed that you're evaluating solutions, and consider bringing more stakeholders into the process during the final stages to get team buy-in.

Step Four: Begin the Search

How should you begin looking for a telemedicine software vendor? It's as easy as typing the right search terms into Google:

- Telehealth software
- Telehealth software company
- Telemedicine solutions
- Telemedicine software

There are also specialty-specific solutions available. For example, if you're a psychiatrist, you could try searching "telepsychiatry." You might also want to browse the telehealth software company listings on review websites.

It is also a good idea to ask other healthcare organizations in your region, or members of professional associations you belong to. Finding a colleague who has already implemented telemedicine can help you plan for deployment, or further refine your plans and goals.

As you search for companies, make a list of your top choices. Pay specific attention to the company's business model. Are they focused on delivering telemedicine directly to patients, or do they develop telehealth software for providers to treat patients with whom they have an established relationship?

Some of the large telehealth companies are primarily direct-to-consumer, but have a branch that offers providers solutions to use with their existing patient base. Generally, you will want to focus on the telehealth software that is specifically built for healthcare providers who are expanding their offerings, and maintaining remote relationships with their established patients. The companies offering those solutions will be more motivated to provide the very best service and product for you and your practice workflows.

Using the goals, pain points, and use case information you gathered at the beginning of the process, draft a list of critical features that your implementation may require.

Establish a realistic budget that you can present to vendors. A good place to start is to ask other organizations about their implementation costs, and try to get estimates from the telemedicine companies on your short list so you can prepare financing and avoid sticker shock later in the process.

Determine up front if you prefer an on-premise solution or a cloud-based telemedicine system. On-premise systems provide a greater degree of control and customization, but will also create new support requirements for your IT team. If you lack the internal technical capabilities to manage the software and hardware on your own, a cloud-based or software-as-a-service (SaaS) system may be preferable.

With an SaaS-based system, your organization will not need to install any new software, hardware, or manage the upkeep of the product. Cloud-based systems also provide access from any device, regardless of location. Implementation costs are typically lower, as the solution is available for a monthly subscription fee. But be aware that some vendors may charge based on usage.

How should you begin looking for a telemedicine software vendor?

Finally, compare the vendor offerings to your requirements document. You can quickly eliminate a number of potential providers by determining which ones lack those key features. Although you may not want to go through the formality of a request for proposal (RFP) process, circulating a requirements document or questionnaire to the vendors' sales teams can help determine which solutions will work and which will not.

Step Five: Evaluate Telemedicine Vendors

Now it's time to take your vendors on a test drive! You have narrowed your list of potential telemedicine companies. How do you know which is the right choice for you?

There are two key parts to evaluating a telehealth vendor:

- Assessing the actual software solution
- Evaluating the company and its provided services

Schedule a live demo of the software with the company's sales team. Be sure to have your list of desired features ready so you can ask specific questions as you see the software in action. If possible, a live demo demo conducted in your office and using your own hardware will be an incredible help. If the solution will require integration with your scheduling platform or other system, ask the vendor how that will work.

Walk through the entire telemedicine process, from the moment a patient accesses the website to schedule a visit, through the administrative processes, and the visit itself. If there's a mobile component, test it out on a variety of supported devices.

Below is a walk-through of the points you may want to consider as you're evaluating each telemedicine vendor. Some of these factors may be more important than others for your organization, but take note of which matter most to your telehealth use application.

Software Features

Interface Design and Engineering

The interface design and system engineering will have a significant impact on staff acceptance, training, patient onboarding, and the ultimate success of the deployment. Make sure the solution is HIPAA-compliant (and COPPA-compliant if your organization will use the system with minors), and the vendor can provide a well-crafted Business Associate Agreement (BAA).

- Is the platform easy to use? (Remember, your patients will be using this too!)
- Can the solution be integrated with your existing scheduling, practice management, or electronic medical record solutions?
- What devices, systems, and browsers is it designed to run on?
- Is there a mobile app? What devices are supported?
- Is it cloud-based or does it require software installation?
- Does it have top-notch security (encryption, signed BAA, HIPAA-compliance)?
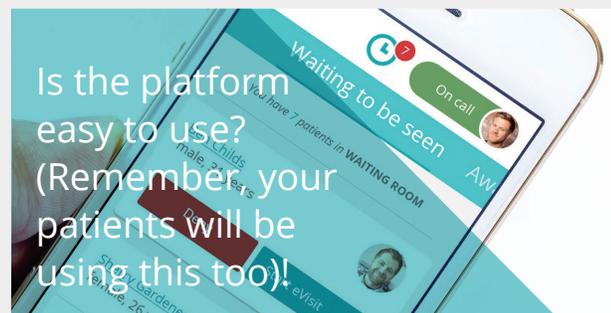
Is the platform easy to use? (Remember, your patients will be using this too)!

Software Features & Workflow

These features will directly affect the patient experience, as well as the integration of telemedicine into your other workflows (including documentation and billing). Make sure the vendor can demonstrate how these features work, preferably using copies of real data from your other systems.

Can the software deliver HD video? If you can't clearly see your patients, it will be difficult to conduct an effective visit, particularly if they need to show you something (a healing surgical site, for example). HD video provides that clear visibility.

Does it have built-in ePrescribe? You will undermine your own efficiency if your telemedicine visit concludes with a handwritten prescription. By sending prescriptions electronically from the telemedicine platform, you can increase accuracy and save time for both your staff and patients.

Does it have built-in billing? Depending on the payer, you will either need to collect a copay or full payment from the patient, or provide a detailed medical chart for reimbursement. The telemedicine platform should make it easy to obtain reimbursement in either scenario.they need to show you something (a healing surgical site, for example). HD video provides that clear visibility.

Does the platform capture patient insurance? Again, the process should mirror an in-person visit. Patients should be able to easily submit insurance information, and the solution should be able to pull existing patient coverage information from your records.

Mobile app available? Telemedicine increases convenience, but only if patients can access the system from any device, anywhere they go. Both physicians and patients should be able to connect from their mobile phones or tablet devices, and the platform should support iOS and Android devices.

How does it capture patient medical history and records? You wouldn't consult with a patient in-person without looking at their medical records – why do so online? The platform should make it easy to review patient medical history before, during, and after the visit.

Can the platform manage the virtual waiting room/patient queue? It should be easy for providers to identify patients on the telemedicine schedule, message them, review their symptoms before the visit, and launch a call.

Documentation

Does the software allow me to record visit notes? Providers should be able to easily record notes electronically within the solution, combine them with self-report data entered by the patient, and store them in the patient record.

Does it easily transfer/export notes to my EMR? This functionality is crucial for keeping an accurate patient history as well as insurance reimbursement.

Does it create a record that I can submit for billing or use as appropriate documentation of the visit?
While payer policies vary, the platform should be flexible enough to provide the required documentation to correctly code and bill for the telemedicine service.

89% of patients felt that a medical video conference examination was the same or better than in-person visit.[9]

Cost

Outline a rough budget have the telemedicine vendor walk through the costs you can expect to encounter. The expenses can vary widely based on the technology and your use case. At eVisit we offer a monthly and annual subscription option, based on your preference.

Here are some common costs:

- Monthly or annual subscription fee
- Equipment and setup needed
- Training
- Support and implementation

Other potential costs to consider:

- Server and software installation
- Marketing
- Platform Customizations
- Ongoing maintenance and software upgrades
- Education resources, certifications, etc.

eVisit
Questions? (844) 693-8474
Product Tour   Solutions ▾   **LET'S GO!**   Log In

Telemedicine, simplified.
ROI included.

See how organizations just like yours are increasing revenue by an average of $26,000 per provider, per year.

How many providers are in your organization?
How many eVisits per provider, per day?
How much do you plan to bill per visit?

By adding eVisit to your practice, you'll increase revenue by:

$0 per year

Get Started! Increase Your Revenue Today!

Check out our online ROI calculator
to see how much revenue you could generate
from the eVisit telemedicine platform.

https://evisit.com/telemedicine-simplified-roi-included/

9. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4284041/

Vendor Services

You aren't just purchasing telemedicine software, you are entering into a partnership. That is why you should always consider the vendor company in addition to the platform.

What type of services does the vendor offer? Does it offer ongoing technical support and help getting your telehealth program up-and- running? Are their mission and values aligned with your own? Are your interactions with the company positive?

Here are some key vendor services to look for:

- Technical support for staff and patients
- Technical support across different modes of communication (chat, email, phone)
- Technical support availability
- Marketing support (including pre-made materials) to help promote telemedicine to patients

> You aren't just purchasing telemedicine software, you are entering into a partnership.

Just as important is the company's overall approach to service and support. When you talk to your chosen vendor, think about whether their employees are consistently friendly and helpful? If you have a problem or a question, someone should get back to right away, and with a clear answer.

Telemedicine is an emerging practice area, and the rules, regulations and technology are frequently changing. Look for a vendor that can provide valuable updates and information on telemedicine in general even after launch.

So, now that you reviewed the list of factors to consider, it's time to make your own checklist. Which features, services, and other factors are you looking for in a telehealth software vendor? Use our checklist on the next page or make your own version.

Step Six: Choose a Winner

Armed with the information you've gathered from your in-depth evaluations, now it's time to pick your winner. Share your checklist with other members of your staff or selection team to make the final decision, and select the telemedicine vendor that best fits your needs.

Telemedicine is going to be a critical capability for healthcare organizations large and small moving forward. Patients are looking for more convenience, and providers are facing much more competitive pressure both in their geographic markets and online. Performance-based reimbursement programs will also drive providers toward solutions that can both improve patient relationships as well as outcomes — something telemedicine can accomplish with a relatively small investment.

Because telemedicine will be such an important part of the health of your company, a rigorous vendor selection process is key. Ad hoc solutions that rely on consumer-style systems like Skype or FaceTime are not secure and could result in costly HIPAA violations.

Following the steps outlined in this guide will put your organization one step closer to building your successful telemedicine program.

ABOUT EVISIT

eVisit is a leading telehealth platform that enables healthcare organizations to increase their revenue without adding overhead, as they serve and retain more patients across a broader coverage area. With eVisit, patients can quickly and easily receive quality health care from their mobile devices without having to visit a physical clinic or hospital. eVisit also reduces patient wait times, shortens patient intake and exit time, and helps clinics balance provider availability across office locations. Hundreds of practices and hospitals are turning to eVisit as a safe and effective solution to meet the demands of their patients.

HEADQUARTERS: 1201 S. Alma School Rd, Suite 15500, Mesa, AZ 85210

eVisit®

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.evisit.com

Talk To A Specialist 844.693.8474