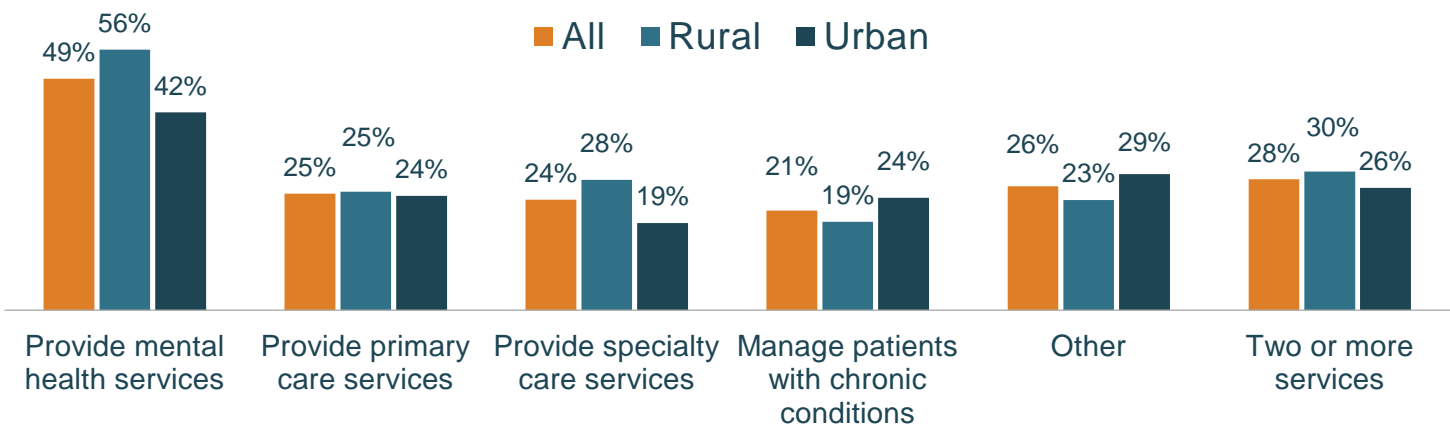


The Health Center Program is Increasing Access to Care through Telehealth

Many communities across the U.S. experience severe challenges accessing needed health care due to an inadequate supply of providers or other economic, cultural, or linguistic barriers. One way providers are addressing these barriers to care is through telehealth.[†] Because [Health Center Program grantees](#)^{*} are required to offer comprehensive services in areas of high need, including sparsely populated rural areas, health centers are pioneering the use of telehealth to expand access to quality health care services.

In 2016, 784 (57%) health centers across the nation had either begun using telehealth, were in the process of implementing a telehealth program, or were actively exploring its feasibility. Of these, 523 health centers, or 38% of all health centers, used telehealth to deliver needed services or help patients monitor their chronic conditions in 2016. Telehealth programs were especially popular in rural health centers, where many residents can face long distances between home and health provider, particularly specialized providers. In rural communities, nearly half (46%) of health centers utilized telehealth technologies, compared to one-third (32%) of urban health centers.

How Health Centers Use Telehealth to Increase Access to Care



Percentages include only health centers utilizing telehealth in 2016.
“Other” includes oral health services.

Health centers that did not implement a telehealth program reported several challenges in doing so. By far the most commonly cited stumbling blocks for these health centers were start-up costs and limited technology infrastructure. Additionally, some health centers stated that inadequate reimbursement hindered their ability to use telehealth. Aside from financial challenges, other health centers found that their patient population, especially homeless and extremely low-income patients, often have internet connectivity problems or unreliable mobile use. As health centers continue to address these challenges and expand telehealth use, they will increase access to the full range of quality health care services for more communities experiencing barriers to care.

[†]The Health Resources and Services Administration defines telehealth as the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to support and promote long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration.

^{*}In this document, unless otherwise noted, the term “health center” is generally used to refer to organizations that receive grants under the Health Center Program as authorized under section 330 of the Public Health Service Act, as amended (referred to as “grantees”) and FQHC-look alike organizations, which meet all the Health Center Program requirements but do not receive Health Center Program grants.

Source: 2016 Uniform Data System, Bureau of Primary Health Care, HRSA, DHHS. Federally funded health centers only. Figures representing the number of health centers in the process of implementing telehealth, actively exploring its feasibility, and challenges are based on NACHC analysis of 2016 UDS data.

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