

# A GUIDE TO TELEHEALTH ENGAGEMENT FOR HEALTH PLANS

**Best Practices for Driving Enrollment,  
Utilization, and Loyalty**





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## I. Engagement: The Key to... Everything Else

The pandemic took telehealth adoption to new heights, but we can't ride this wave forever. How do we capitalize on increased awareness and enable virtual care to flourish and grow? It comes down to one thing: engagement.

The acceleration of telehealth usage during the pandemic is hard to comprehend. Until COVID-19 arrived in early 2020, telehealth was a niche phenomenon for most patients (and providers too). In 2019, just 8% of consumers had ever had a telehealth visit.<sup>1</sup> By March 2021, more than 60% of consumers said they had used telehealth.<sup>2</sup> For most of those first-time consumers, they had their first-ever video visit because doctor's offices and urgent care facilities were closed, yet they were still able to get the care they needed: an antibiotic for their child's ear infection, a check-in to manage their diabetes, a therapy session. And they had a positive experience —more than 90% of those who had a virtual visit said they were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with the visit.<sup>1</sup>

Telehealth awareness is at an all-time high and is being used for a broader range of conditions than ever before — not just urgent care

and behavioral health, but also dermatology, nutrition, and musculoskeletal care. And yet there are already signs that telehealth usage is tapering off. Now that the pandemic is (mostly) behind us, how do we ensure that telehealth continues to deliver and doesn't become a COVID-19 memory alongside toilet paper shortages, quarantine baking, and *Tiger King*?

The truth is most health plans struggle to engage members in a telehealth benefit. Even during the pandemic, only 26% of health plan executives cited higher than expected utilization of their telehealth offering.<sup>3</sup> Why? It's not the quality of the offering or the care. When people use telehealth, they like it — and they tend to use it again. Texas Children's Health Plan, for instance, saw that nearly 60% of its members who used the telehealth benefit were repeat users.<sup>4</sup>





**60%**  
OF MEMBERS WHO TRIED  
TELEHEALTH WERE REPEAT USERS

The real reason is because we aren't engaging with members in a way that is relevant to their life, their needs, and their challenges. If we're being honest, the tools most health plans rely on to communicate with their members about telehealth — emails, text messages, direct mail, whatever it may be — are bland, generic, and too often ignored. You could have the best telehealth offering in the world, but if people don't know about it, game over.

To capitalize on telehealth's opportunities — reach new members, engage existing ones in new programs, educate all members on how they can incorporate virtual care into the healthcare experience, and reduce costs and inefficient care — health plans need to develop a strong engagement strategy and consistent, effective tactics that communicate the value of telehealth and reach the member at the right place and time in their healthcare journey.

### Telehealth engagement: a new spin on an old challenge

Engagement has always been a challenge. For instance, many of you are probably struggling with a lack of member email addresses. We know this is a big pain point for health plans, whether it is because emails aren't collected during member enrollment, or because it's difficult to make a case to large employer accounts to provide em-

ployee email addresses. There are also rules and regulations we all need to abide by when using certain marketing channels. SMS marketing, for instance, requires implied consent from members, and retargeting ads cannot violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

All of these challenges still apply. But telehealth engagement has some unique characteristics. The real-time, always-on, virtual nature of telehealth means that reaching your members at the right place and the right time, through a variety of channels and messages that take into account variables like age, socioeconomic status, and technological literacy, is even more important.

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In this guide, Amwell's marketing team shares the best practices we've collected in years of working with health plans to build effective engagement strategies. It's from these experiences that we know the best place to start is by identifying key characteristics of your audience and then using that information to drive engagement through a multichannel marketing approach.



## II. Know Your Audience: Member Characteristics

Knowing the characteristics and specific needs of your membership and target audience as they relate to virtual care is critical for effective communication and engagement.

Before diving into the components of a multichannel marketing approach, you need to understand who your key audience is, what they value, and how that is relevant to virtual care. You also need to know where they are most likely to engage with your content. This knowledge will play a critical role when it comes to deciding which channels to target for specific audiences, and it will impact the type of language and messaging you use to highlight your virtual care program.

There are a variety of characteristics health plans can analyze when determining what marketing tactics may work best for your audience. We highlight a few here to help you begin to think differently about how to thoughtfully engage members and boost enrollments and utilization.





## AGE

Openness to specific offerings and to virtual care overall differs markedly across generations — as do media consumption and online behaviors that tend to influence the effectiveness of marketing and communications tactics. For instance, the younger Generation Z (18 to 24 years old) are less willing to use telehealth compared to Millennials and Generation X, however, Generation Z is the most willing to see a PCP virtually, and more than half would switch their current PCP to one who offered telehealth. Digging into these age-specific preferences can help determine what programs you should communicate to members, and what channels you should use to reach them.

## HOUSEHOLD MAKEUP

Members can have very different health needs depending on the makeup of their homes, and that can have a big impact on messaging. Families with young children, for instance, are much more interested in seeing a primary care physician over video (88%) compared to those with no child living in the household (73%).<sup>1</sup> Messaging to parents should focus on the programs—virtual primary care—and value drivers—fast care, 24/7 availability—that they care about.

## HEALTH STATUS

Knowing the health risks of different member populations can help you better tailor messaging. For instance, messaging to older populations with a prevailing risk of chronic conditions will look very different compared to the younger populations who are relatively healthy and more prone to mental health issues.

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

Household income, insurance type, and education status are not only associated with certain health risks, but they are also closely related to other social and economic factors that have implications for virtual care and the channels and messaging that will resonate most. Language barriers, for instance, play a large role in member awareness, understanding and utilization of telehealth. Leading with Spanish-first communications for certain audiences, and clearly communicating how telehealth can help, especially in Spanish, is a good place to start.

## GEOGRAPHY

It's known that telehealth is a big benefit to rural populations, and that uneven broadband access continues to play a role in telehealth utilization. Other geography considerations that can have an impact on telehealth messaging include lack of transportation, both in urban and rural areas, and proximity to in-person care regardless of population density. Messaging that addresses these geographic barriers to care may entice certain members to try virtual care.





### III. Channels and Tactics

Once you know your audience, where, when, and how you engage with them will be the determining factor in how they interact with your telehealth benefit.

Amwell's experience marketing telehealth on behalf of our client partners has consistently shown that a multichannel approach and a nuanced understanding of each channel are both essential. Before we dive into the different channels and tactics necessary for an impactful engagement strategy, let's begin by defining some key terms:

- **Channels.** The medium of the communication, such as email, direct mail, text message, and social media.
- **Tactics.** How channels and messages are combined and put to use to support a specific engagement strategy.

When targeting your audience, it's important that you use every channel you have to engage them. While it's true that different populations are more likely to engage with messaging in certain channels, leaning too heavily on any one channel will almost certainly cause you to miss a significant fraction of members.



## EMAIL



## PUSH

### WHY

Email is the go-to channel for direct communication with your members. It drives action and provides flexibility in terms of design, member segmentation, and frequency.

With push notifications, which pop up on members' smartphones, there's less competition for attention. They're ideal for seasonal reminders and for triggered communication to drive action based on behavior.

### WHAT TO CONSIDER

- **Inboxes are mini search engines.** Even if members don't take action right away, they might search for it later.
- **Spam filters are always a concern.** Track your open rates and watch for sudden drop-offs.
- **Test for takeaways.** Test to see what types of content your audience likes. Keep an eye on page views, click-through rates and other metrics.
- **Track lift . . . but don't overthink it.** Not every email needs to drive #% lift; the totality of your content needs to.

- **When your phone lights up, you look.** We're wired to look at our phones. However, push notifications do have to be turned on, and default options vary across phones.
- **Less is more.** Think tight and succinct. You only have about 180 characters (with spaces) to work with.
- **Have fun with it.** Notifications with a light, playful tone can help grab attention. Consider fun emojis in seasonal reminders.
- **Try a trigger.** When a member opens the urgent care practice but doesn't have a visit, a push that says "Need to see a doctor? Wait times are 10 minutes or less" can nudge them to get the care they need.

### STATS

# 30%

Increase in virtual visit volume Amwell drove for LiveHealth Online through ongoing email campaigns

# 3%

Lift in visits on the Amwell app attributable to push notification campaigns.

### WHAT WE SAY

"Email is best for communicating directly with members. That said, too much of a good thing can backfire. Always be aware of how many emails you are sending and maintain a balance so you don't lose your audience through unsubscribes."

**Eric Stehnach**, Senior Associate, Messaging, Amwell



"Beware that engagement metrics can be artificially inflated by users tapping on their notifications to clear them out. To best determine effectiveness, choose a down funnel metric like visits."

**Erendira Corral**, Messaging Associate, Amwell





## WEB CONTENT



## SOCIAL

### WHY

Web content has three big advantages: space, searchability, and shelf life. It offers the real estate needed for detailed information — FAQs, step-by-step instructions — and links to related resources.

Social media is an easy and effective way to engage your membership and leverage content such as infographics, videos, blogs, and more.

### KEY FACTS

- **Promote on the member home page:** Where do members go when they need to find care? Your website or mobile app. Make sure virtual care is front and center with a direct link to your virtual care experience.
- **Integrate into your provider finder tool:** Members also rely on the provider finder tool to find care. Be sure to promote telehealth within the search function, and use promotional ads that show up when doctors' offices are closed to prevent unnecessary ER visits.
- **SEO never ends...** Search algorithms change constantly, so staying relevant requires ongoing optimization, content updates, and website health checks.
- **... but SEO isn't everything.** Members find their way to relevant web content via links in emails and social posts, vanity URLs on direct mail, homepage banners, and more.

- **Post regularly.** A consistent cadence of new content shows that your platform is active and relevant.
- **Be helpful and fun.** Members are most likely to share, like, and bookmark content that they can use.
- **Avoid clinical jargon.** A sure way to alienate audiences is by using terms that are too complicated. Keep it simple!
- **Embrace diversity.** Social media casts a wide net, so make sure that you are representing all populations in your content, in both your visuals and text.
- **Use a carousel.** Posting multiple photos or videos that members swipe through is a good way to break larger topics down into digestible pieces for social media.

### STATS

**75%** of Amwell's blog traffic comes from organic traffic, demonstrating the importance of SEO.

**35%** Increase in engagement among LiveHealth Online members seen with carousel posts versus single-image posts.

### WHAT WE SAY

"Remember that virtual care is still relatively new. People will have questions and will get lost on their telehealth 'journey,' so it's extra important for the telehealth information on your website to be easy to find, reliable, informative, and reassuring."

**Azra Cosic**, Senior Website Marketing Manager, Amwell



"There's often a huge disconnect between the terminology and vocabulary that clinicians are using and the language that the actual general public understands."

**Arielle Bobek**, Social Media Manager, Amwell







## DIRECT MAIL



## TEXT/SMS

### WHY

While direct mail marketing was once oversaturated, the rise of digital media has revived direct mail as a key marketing strategy, especially for populations less inclined to check email or text messages.

Text messages are immediate and direct, and can encourage members to enroll or have a visit, or they can serve as an appointment reminder.

### KEY FACTS

- **Modernize your methods.** QR codes on mailed materials, for instance, allow for precise tracking of direct mail campaigns and better insight into member actions.
- **White space is your friend.** Don't try to cram as much as you can onto printed materials. Otherwise, people will just glaze over and throw it away.
- **Use prominent calls-to-action.** Be clear. Tell your audience what you want them to do and exactly how to do it.
- **Think beyond paper.** Magnets and other easily mailable tag-ons are a great way to extend the shelf life of a marketing campaign.

- **Be deliberate.** Text campaigns shouldn't have more than three messages. You don't want to spam recipients.
- **Be concise.** Character limits require you to be brief yet informative, to convey an impactful message with a clear call-to-action.
- **Don't shy away from [emoji].** While it might seem too informal to include an emoji or gif in a text message meant to boost engagement or enrollment, members are used to them and they can make your brand more relatable.
- **Spread it out.** Space out the time between multiple messages to avoid spamming members.

### STATS

# 43%

Increase in visits attributable to direct mail campaigns when mailers include consumer testimonials, according to Amwell research

# 27%

Click-through rate for text messages sent by Amwell, well above the industry average of 19%

### WHAT WE SAY

"Direct mail is a great way to reach people who maybe aren't the primary benefit holder. Multiple people are often more likely to see a piece of mail, as opposed to a direct digital communication."

**Marie Renzi**, Director of Health Plan & Employer Engagement, Amwell



"The key to a successful SMS campaign is to make the message impactful so that you don't aggravate or annoy the member by blowing up their phone with too many messages. They must find value in communication that they're receiving."

**Chris Collins**, Marketing Manager, Amwell



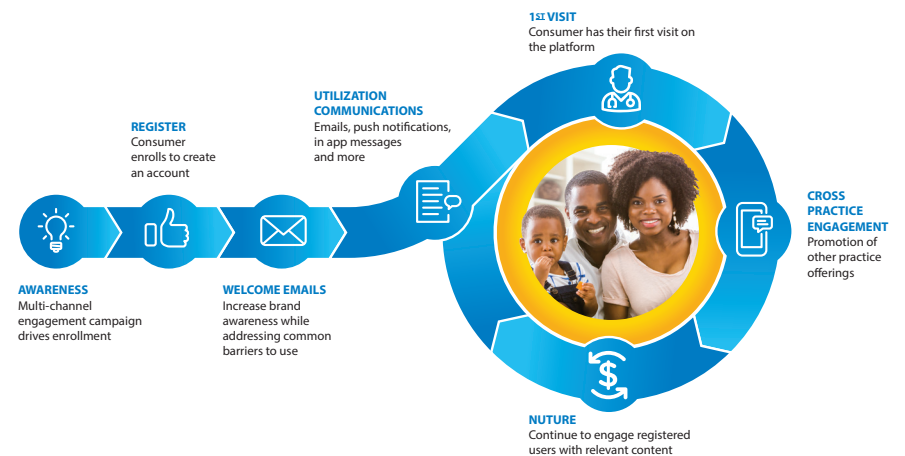
## IV: Putting It All Together: The Member Journey

Combining audience insights and tactical best practices in a member journey is an effective way of planning, testing, and refining your telehealth engagement strategy.

It's not enough to create compelling benefits and content. Optimizing your marketing channels and engaging members in telehealth also means reaching members with the right message at the right time. And that involves not only understanding who your members are but also understanding where they are in their overall telehealth journey. Are they brand new to telehealth, and need some basic how-tos? Have they used telehealth for sporadic urgent care but aren't aware of other benefits? Are they managing a chronic condition and hoping virtual care can make their life easier? Each of these scenarios involves a slightly different approach.

The member journey — and the associated questions and considerations — can be broken down into four main phases:

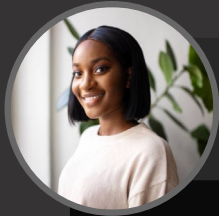
- **Awareness.** Which benefits are available to me, and how can they make my life easier?
- **Enrollment.** How do I enroll and access my benefits?
- **Utilization.** When are virtual visits useful and appropriate?
- **Engagement.** I've tried telehealth and see the values. How else can I use it to care for myself and my family?



Answering these questions requires locating members in time and space and serving up the optimal tactics and messages. The example on the following page shows a bird's-eye view of this approach, featuring Kelly, a married working mom of three. Kelly believes her own health and that of her family is a top priority, but she always has too much to do and never enough time and wishes accessing care were faster and easier.

**Who can relate, right?**

# Ongoing Utilization



Selects a health plan from her new employer that offers virtual Urgent Care as a covered benefit

Develops cold and flu symptoms

Struggling with pollen season (yet again)

Fills prescription at local pharmacy

Worried about her child's anxiety levels

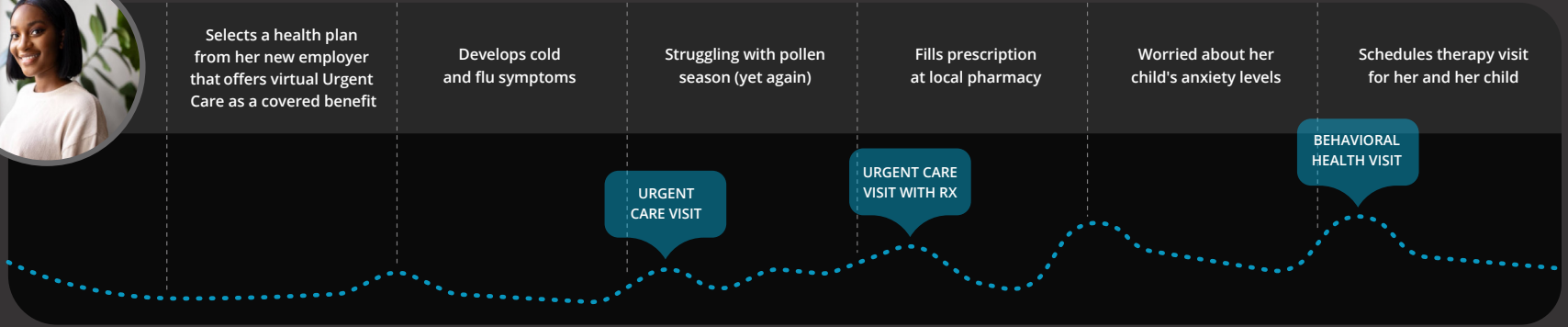
Schedules therapy visit for her and her child

URGENT CARE VISIT

URGENT CARE VISIT WITH RX

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH VISIT

Engagement Level



## ENROLLMENT

## UTILIZATION

## ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

TEXT / SMS	Appointment Reminder	Visit Invite Link	Appointment Reminder  Visit Invite Link
PUSH NOTIFICATIONS		Monthly Utilization Campaigns	Behavioral Health Cross-Sell Campaign
WEBSITE	Enrollment Landing Page	Patient Education ("When to Use Telehealth?")	Visit Scheduling  Patient Education ("Your First Therapy Visit: What to Expect")
EMAIL	Enrollment Campaign		
DIRECT MAIL			
SOCIAL MEDIA	Awareness Campaign		



## Additional Resources

### Engaging Medicaid Populations in Telehealth

Texas Children's Health Plan conducted a survey of its telehealth enrollees to answer key questions around Medicaid member telehealth usage, including the role **socioeconomic factors** like **language barriers** play in member awareness and understanding of telehealth.



### MVP Health Care's Medicare Advantage Utilization Analysis

MVP Health Care **analyzed its Medicare Advantage members' adoption of telehealth** and based on those findings strategically reintroduced the benefit to the population with impressive results.



### How MetroPlus Used Multichannel Marketing to Drive Adoption among Medicaid Members

New York City's MetroPlus Health Plan deployed a **multichannel marketing effort**, consisting of **emails, direct mailers, IVR calls and SMS texts**, to engage nearly 7,000 Medicaid members in under three months.



### How Assisted Enrollment Drives Increased Telehealth Utilization

Anthem's telehealth program, LiveHealth Online, used **assisted enrollment campaigns** to drive increased telehealth utilization for Anthem clients. This case study shows how two of these clients used assisted enrollments to increase telehealth usage and decrease costs.



### Amwell's 2020 Physician and Consumer Survey

Take a deeper look into what happened during the pandemic—including how consumer experiences, behaviors and expectations shifted. Learn more about **generational trends for virtual care** and use these insights to strategize around how best to analyze your own telehealth enrollment and utilization data.



### Insights from Amwell's 2021 Survey of Health Plans, Hospitals and Health Systems, and Clinicians

Amwell teamed up with HIMSS Analytics to ask senior executives at hospitals, health systems, and health plans across the country about their post-pandemic strategy and their planned investments in telehealth. Learn how **telehealth utilization is meeting health plan executives' expectations**.



#### Sources:

1. From Virtual Care to Hybrid Care: COVID-19 and the Future of Telehealth. Insights from the 2020 Amwell Physician and Consumer Survey. Amwell
2. How Americans Feel About Telehealth: One Year Later. Sykes.
3. Building the Future of Virtual Care: Streamlined, Scalable, Sustainable. Insights from Amwell's 2021 Survey of Health Plans, Hospitals and Health Systems, and Clinicians. Amwell.
4. Engaging the Medicaid Population in Telehealth, Insights from a Texas Children's Health Plan Membership Survey: Amwell.



