Leveraging Digital Health Tools to Advance Health Equity

GEORGIA

To address gaps in technology adoption that impact underserved communities, the National Center for Primary Care (NCPC) at Morehouse School of Medicine is examining the adoption and use of digital health tools by primary care clinicians in four southeastern states: Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Digital health tools (DHT) include:
- telemedicine
- home/remote monitoring
- health information exchange
- prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP)
- mobile applications, and other technologies used in healthcare settings
- patient portal
- electronic health records
- wearable devices

Georgia Demographics

Total Population: 10.5 million+

4% Asian | 33% Black | 3% Other | 60% White

Hispanic Ethnicity

Live in Rural Area

10%

17%

Social Determinants of Health in Georgia

15% Living in Poverty

141 Medically Underserved Areas

14% Living without Health Insurance

267,000 Living within the Medicaid Coverage Gap

7% Households without a car

138 Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas

More than 400 clinicians in Georgia have completed the survey, highlighting the challenges and opportunities they have experienced using digital health tools.

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This project was funded in partnership with the United Health Foundation, grant number 6479.
The majority of the 400 clinicians from Georgia who participated in the survey held MD or DO credentials, specialized in primary care, and practiced in urban areas. They reported being satisfied with existing DHT.

**Credentials**
- MD/DO: 57%
- NP/PA/CNM: 24%
- PhD: 5%
- Other: 14%

**Specialties**
- Primary Care (FM, IM, GER, Peds): 79%
- Mental/Behavioral Health: 4%
- Obstetrics and Gynecology: 3%
- Other: 10%

**Medicaid Participation**
- Accept Medicaid: 89% (Overall Study), 86% (Georgia)
- Participate in Medicaid EHR Incentive Program: 35% (Overall Study), 38% (Georgia)

**Practice Size**
- Solo Practice: 9%
- Small Practice: 9.7%
- Large Practice: 30.4%
- Hospital/Hospital and Outpatient Primary Care: 30.7%
- Community Health Center: 30.4%

**Survey Participants Demographics**
89.6% of all survey participants practice in urban areas.
9% practice in rural areas.
90.5% of survey participants in Georgia practice in urban areas.
8.2% practice in rural areas.

**Technology Enthusiasm**
- Eager or Early Adopters: 52% (Overall Study), 56% (Georgia)
- Neutral: 31% (Overall Study), 31% (Georgia)
- Skeptical or Hesitant: 17% (Overall Study), 13% (Georgia)

**Reported Levels of Satisfaction**
- Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their telemedicine experience: 61%
- Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their electronic health record experience: 73%

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Current Digital Health Tool Use

Nearly 99% of all providers who participated in the survey use digital health tools. Georgia providers reported similar usage rates.

Seven in 10 providers reported being connected to the Health Information Exchange (HIE), but less than half reported using it.

Digital Health Tool Use and COVID-19

90% of all survey participants reported using DHT because of COVID-19

54% of respondents who used telehealth because of COVID-19 reported it was their first time

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Reasons for Using Digital Health Tools during COVID-19

- Treatment of COVID-19 positive patients: 50.0%
- Treatment of COVID-19 negative patients: 54.3%
- Training: 27.5%
- Other: 8.9%

62.8%
66.8%
39.2%
10.4%
Factors that Support and Impede Digital Health Tool Adoption

Why should I cater to the EHR? The EHR should cater to me.  
-Focus Group Participant

When asked what would you tell leaders and decision-makers to help better serve patients: “A [national] health information exchange or EMR that you can access everybody’s information no matter where they went and ideally would include social services as well. Maybe even the jail, like truly everything.”  
-Focus Group Participant

Top Barriers to Adopting Digital Health Tools
- 52% Time
- 49% Cost
- 37% Limited Workflow Integration

Top Factors Supporting Digital Health Tool Adoption
- 61% Ease of Workflow Integration
- 59% Meets Patient Need
- 52% Improves Patient Health

Reimbursement as a Support for Digital Health Tool Adoption
- Federal or State Incentive Payments: 35.2%
- Reimbursement by Public Payers: 32.4%
- Reimbursement by Private Payers: 23.7%

...at our center, a lot of our front desk people are assuming that our older clientele were not tech-savvy. They weren't even saying, "Give me your email address, let me sign you up for the portal." I said, "No. If you ask them, most of them have [an email address]." My dad’s 80 and he’s like, "I want a new Apple Watch, my email is whatever." Now, he does break down and wait for my children to come because he locked himself out. But they are on and using it.  
-Focus Group Participant

Mandated and Voluntary Reasons for Adopting Digital Health Tools
- Federal or State Law: 66.2%
- Practice Leadership: 52.9%
- Practice Decision: 50.3%
- Individual Decision: 47.8%

Reasons for Digital Health Tool Use after COVID-19
- Triage: patients before visit to emergency department (for COVID and non-COVID related symptoms)
- Assessment: management of COVID-19 symptoms prior to referral to specialists and hospitals
- Chronic Care: to care for rural and underserved communities
- Continued Access: to care for rural and underserved communities

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