Leveraging Digital Health Tools to Advance Health Equity

TENNESSEE

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

Tennessee Demographics

Total Population: 7 million+

2% Asian | 17% Black | 3% Other | 78% White

Hispanic Ethnicity

Live in Rural Area

6%

22%

More than 160 clinicians in Tennessee have completed the survey, highlighting the challenges and opportunities they have experienced using digital health tools.

Social Determinants of Health in Tennessee

12% Living in Poverty

100 Medically Underserved Areas

10% Living without Health Insurance

113,000 Living within the Medicaid Coverage Gap

7% Households without a car

88 Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas

This project was funded in partnership with the United Health Foundation, grant number 6479.
The majority of the 161 clinicians from Tennessee 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.

**Survey Participants Demographics**

- **Credentials**
  - MD/DO: 68%
  - PhD: 6%
  - NP/PA/CNM: 18%
  - Other: 8%

- **Specialties**
  - Primary Care (FM, IM, GER, PEDS): 77%
  - Mental/Behavioral Health: 3%
  - Obstetrics and Gynecology: 10%
  - Other: 10%

- **Medicaid Participation**
  - Overall Study: 89%
  - Tennessee: 89%
  - Accept Medicaid: 35%
  - Participate in Medicaid EHR: 33%

- **Provider Practice**
  - Solo Practice: 3.1%
  - Small Practice: 14.9%
  - Large Practice: 31.7%
  - Hospital/Hospital and Outpatient Primary Care: 34.8%
  - Community Health Center: 8.1%

- **Practice Locations**
  - 89.6% of all survey participants practice in urban areas
  - 9% practice in rural areas
  - 88.2% of survey participants in Tennessee practice in urban areas
  - 10.6% practice in rural areas

- **Technology Enthusiasm**
  - Overall Study: 52%
  - Tennessee: 37%
  - Eager or Early Adopters: 31%
  - Neutral: 29%
  - Skeptical or Hesitant: 36%

- **Levels of Satisfaction**
  - Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their telemedicine experience: 70%
  - Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their electronic health record experience: 79%

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

More than 9 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

89.8% of survey participants in Tennessee reported using DHT because of COVID-19

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

43% of respondents who used telehealth because of COVID-19 reported it was their first time

Reasons for Using Digital Health Tools during COVID-19:

- Training: 34%
- Treatment of COVID-19 positive patients: 29.8%
- Treatment of COVID-19 negative patients: 40.4%
- Other: 21%

Nearly 91% of providers reported being connected to the Health Information Exchange (HIE), but less than half reported using it.

90.7% of respondents were connected to the State HIE

47% of respondents were using the State HIE

More than 90% of respondents were connected to the Health Information Exchange (HIE), but less than half reported using it.

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Factors that Support and Impede Digital Health Tool Adoption

### Top Barriers to Adopting Digital Health Tools
- **Time**: 53%
- **Cost**: 57%
- **Limited Workflow Integration**: 35%

### Top Factors Supporting Digital Health Tool Adoption
- **Ease of Workflow Integration**: 51%
- **Meets Patient Need**: 53%
- **Improves Patient Health**: 50%

### Reasons for Adopting Digital Health Tools after COVID-19
- **Continuity of Care**: with specialists and other health care professionals
- **Expand Access**: for patients to behavioral health services
- **Management**: of opioid prescribing and pain management visits

### Reimbursement as a Support for Digital Health Tool Adoption
- Federal or State Incentive Payments: 36%
- Reimbursement by Public Payers: 32.3%
- Reimbursement by Private Payers: 22.4%

### Reasons for Adopting Digital Health Tools
- **Mandated**: 66.2%
- **Voluntary**: 33.8%
  - Federal or State Law: 52.9%
  - Practice Leadership: 50.3%
  - Practice Decision: 47.8%