



WHITE PAPER

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# The Promise of Virtual Primary Care

How a virtual solution amplifies value and accelerates access to primary care for entire populations



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Virtual primary care: The time is now

Over recent years, virtual care offerings have grown dramatically in scope and scale—and COVID-19 has only proven to accelerate this trend.

In the midst of the pandemic, payers, providers, employers and members are recognizing the benefits (and necessity) of a virtual care solution for episodic care—but the time is also right to think beyond episodic and consider longitudinal.

As a model that delivers proven cost savings and improved outcomes, virtual primary care should be prioritized as a critical part of any payer's or employer's strategy to implement a comprehensive health offering.

This white paper examines the barriers to primary care adoption, a unique care model designed to address those barriers, how that model has proven to create value for payers and members, and what to look for when seeking a virtual primary care partner.

## CONTEXT

### Primary care delivers proven value

Primary care is widely accepted as a valued care model that helps contain rising costs. Those who engage with primary care identify their health issues earlier and more effectively,<sup>1</sup> have better adherence,<sup>2</sup> enjoy better chronic disease management<sup>3</sup> and ultimately gain better health outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

“The patient-provider relationship is really the backbone of delivering good primary care, and it’s really why primary care is so valuable. The trust and familiarity between those two parties allow the best possible care to be delivered over time.”

**Dr. Nipun Sharma**  
Board Certified, Internal Medicine

## THE PROBLEM

### Traditional primary care doesn't work for everyone

The problem is that not enough Americans are using primary care. **In past years, almost 50% of adults did not visit a primary care provider.**<sup>5</sup>

#### COVID-19 AMPLIFIES THE PRIMARY CARE PROBLEM

Screenings, preventive care and other primary care benefits are in decline

42%

**drop in volume of in-person primary care office visits** since the COVID-19 inception<sup>6,7</sup>

<10%

of primary care practices have stabilized amid the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>6</sup>

78%

of surveyed clinicians report **preventive and chronic care are being deferred** or delayed by patients<sup>6</sup>

46%

**decline in cancer detection** during COVID-19, which may lead to more advanced stages and poorer clinical outcomes<sup>8</sup>

The reason? For commercially insured adults between the ages of 18 and 49, the traditional primary care model doesn't meet their expectations. And in recent months, COVID-19 has only brought the limitations of the traditional model to light: Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a **42% drop in volume of in-person primary care office visits.**<sup>6</sup>

In proprietary research, Teladoc Health has identified four key barriers to this demographic's use of primary care:

- 1** Healthcare is associated with sickness—not wellness
- 2** The experience can be time-consuming and inconvenient
- 3** The model doesn't meet their expectations as consumers
- 4** Healthcare is associated with unpredictable, high costs



## A PROVEN SOLUTION

### A new solution designed to remove barriers to adoption

With the limitations of a traditional primary care model clearer than ever, how can health plans and employers continue to deliver on its proven benefits while

- 1** maintaining the networks that they have heavily invested in building, and
- 2** addressing the growing barriers to member adoption and usage?

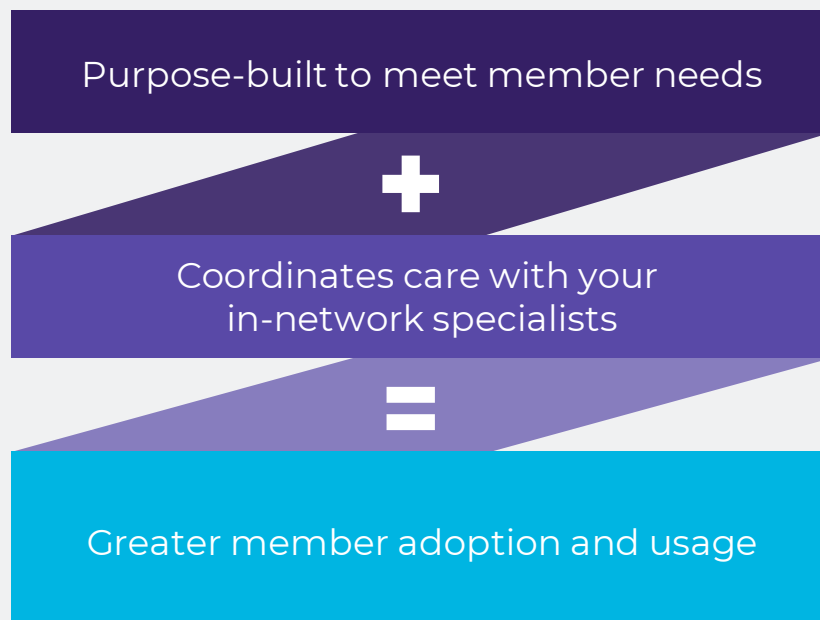
One proven solution is virtual primary care.

Bridging the gap between member expectations for a modern, personalized experience and the clinical value that primary care can deliver, a virtual solution has the potential to address barriers to adoption and inspire meaningful, longitudinal relationships between members and providers.

“Virtual primary care aims to blend the value of primary care with the convenience of virtual care. Now is an essential time to accelerate primary care, to innovate, to deliver primary care with more flexibility, which must include virtual primary care.”

**Dr. Paul Sarmiento**  
Board Certified, Family Medicine

## IDEAL VIRTUAL PRIMARY CARE MODEL





In an ideal state, a virtual primary care solution will suit payer, employer, provider and member needs by coordinating with existing in-network specialists to create a cost-effective, highly engaging front door to healthcare that supports the entire continuum of members' health needs.

## A SOLUTION THAT SUPPORTS MEMBER HEALTH—AND PAYERS' EXISTING ECOSYSTEMS



### WELLNESS AND PREVENTION

- In-depth annual exams: biometrics, labs, screenings and preventive care
- Personalized wellness plans with counseling and member education
- Data-driven triggered communications



### DIAGNOSE AND TREAT

- Assess symptoms and diagnose conditions
- Prescribe medications, therapies and digital therapeutics as medically necessary



### REFER AND COORDINATE

- Guide to high-quality, in-network specialists for in-person care
- Collaborative provider-to-provider consults
- Counsel and support members for successful care and follow up



### MONITOR AND MANAGE

- Implement care plans, remotely monitor conditions, ensure adherence and track progress
- Conduct outreach and intervention as needed



## CASE STUDY

# Pilot program shows value is amplified, access to care accelerated

Before bringing its proprietary virtual primary care solution to market, Teladoc Health launched an internal pilot program among its employees in May 2020.

Within its first 90 days of launch, several key trends emerged. First, over 30% of participants completed an annual exam and received personalized care plans. Second, despite being designed to capture the 18- to 49-year-old population, a high percentage of 49-year-old-plus participants elected to engage with virtual primary care to treat and/or identify complex and chronic health concerns.

### WITHIN 90 DAYS OF PILOT LAUNCH

>30%	10%	13%	95	~50%	~25%
of members completed annual exams and received personalized care plans	referred to Teladoc Health specialists for virtual care	referred to an in-network specialist	Net Promoter Score	of hypertension diagnoses were first-time diagnoses	of diabetes diagnoses were first-time diagnoses

Especially given that COVID-19 has dramatically reduced access to brick-and-mortar primary care, the pilot demonstrated that a virtual solution has the potential to amplify value and accelerate access to care among entire member populations—not just those that are typically younger and healthier.

The Teladoc Health pilot program showed that the virtual primary care solution not only delivers on the potential of primary care in terms of wellness and prevention, but that the member-centric experience allowed participants to overcome the typical barriers to traditional primary care. The pilot is encouraging evidence that a virtual solution can reliably deliver value to payers across their entire care ecosystems and member populations—making care more accessible and satisfying, and driving higher ROI and savings from adherence as opposed to high-touch primary care.

“Virtual primary care has definitely enhanced my ability to support patients in a variety of ways. I think they all come back to access. If I’m able to reach out to the patient when I need to, if they’re able to reach me easily and there are no barriers in between, that leads to better care.”

**Dr. Nipun Sharma**  
Board Certified, Internal Medicine

“I felt that the virtual primary care visits met all of my needs, all of my desires, everything that I was really looking for. It met the convenience factor. I was able to develop a relationship with primary care that I’ve never had in the past. I felt extremely comfortable talking to my primary care provider and having conversations about all of my health needs. I definitely want to continue with my Teladoc primary care provider.”

**Lauren Kenney, pilot participant**

## FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

# Key questions to ask when evaluating virtual primary care solutions

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no shortage of virtual care providers who ostensibly possess the ability to drive value through virtual primary care. The challenge for payers and employers lies in choosing a virtual care solution that can meet their varied needs.

When seeking a partner that can deliver on the promise of virtual primary care, consider these factors:

### COMPLEMENTARY CARE ECOSYSTEM.



To truly make primary care accessible to an entire member population, look for a solution that is designed to complement—not replace—an existing in-network ecosystem.

- How does it integrate with existing plan benefits and designs?
- How does it go beyond a general medicine offering that delivers episodic care to encourage lasting, multi-year relationships?

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### CLINICAL QUALITY.



Skepticism about the quality of virtual care can be a barrier for some members.

- Does the solution truly deliver a range of high-quality clinical care?
- Are their providers trained to deliver care in a virtual setting?

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### SCALABILITY.



- Does the solution have the proven ability to meet member needs consistently and across all modalities and geographies served?
- Is it truly secure and HIPAA-compliant across all touch points?

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### MEMBER EXPERIENCE.



- Does the solution have a proven member engagement strategy that can overcome barriers to adoption and reliably entice members to try virtual primary care?
- How is the experience designed to encourage longitudinal engagement with their care? Does the solution ensure that a member sees the same provider visit after visit?
- From the member perspective, how does the solution ensure an experience that delivers beyond what traditional brick-and-mortar primary care can?

## ABOUT TELADOC HEALTH

# Leading virtual healthcare solutions

Teladoc Health is transforming how people access and experience healthcare. Recognized as the world leader in virtual care, Teladoc Health directly delivers millions of medical visits across 175 countries each year through the Teladoc Health Medical Group and enables millions of member and provider touch points for thousands of hospitals, health systems and physician practices globally.

To activate the unique potential of primary care to drive downstream value to payers, alleviate the clinical burden for providers and inspire members to engage more fully in their healthcare, Teladoc Health has created a new virtual primary care solution designed to inspire meaningful, longitudinal relationships between members and providers.

The Teladoc Health virtual primary care solution has been proven to reliably amplify the value of and accelerate access to the benefits that a traditional care model delivers—but through an intuitive, immersive and secure in-app experience that has **an engagement rate more than four times that of similar solutions.**<sup>7</sup>



Teladoc Health leverages more than a decade of expertise and real-time insights to meet the growing virtual care needs of consumers, healthcare professionals, employers and health plans.

For more information, please visit [TeladocHealth.com](https://www.teladochealth.com) or follow [@TeladocHealth](https://twitter.com/TeladocHealth) on Twitter.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Vogel, Lauren. 2019. "Life expectancy grows with supply of primary care doctors." CMAJ March 25, 2019 191 (12) E347; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5729>.

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<sup>4</sup>Rosenberg, Jaime. 2019. "Integrated Disease Management Improves Clinical Outcomes, QOL in Patients With COPD in Primary Care." The American Journal of Managed Care April 1, 2019. <https://www.ajmc.com/view/integrated-disease-management-improves-clinical-outcomes-qol-in-patients-with-copd-in-primary-care>.

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<sup>6</sup>Landi, Heather. 2020. "Fewer than 10% of primary care practices have stabilized operations amid COVID-19 pandemic." Fierce Healthcare July 30, 2020. <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/practices/fewer-than-10-primary-care-practices-have-stabilized-operations-amid-covid-19-pandemic>.

<sup>7</sup>Business Group on Health. 2016. "Large Employers' 2017 Health Plan Design Survey." August 9, 2016. <https://www.businessgrouphealth.org/pressroom/pressRelease.cfm?ID=281>.

<sup>8</sup>Kaufman, Harvey W. et al. 2020. "Changes in the Number of US Patients With Newly Identified Cancer Before and During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic." JAMA Network Open August 4, 2020. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2768946>.

## LEARN MORE

[TeladocHealth.com](https://www.teladochealth.com) | [engage@teladochealth.com](mailto:engage@teladochealth.com)



### About Teladoc Health

Teladoc Health is the global virtual care leader, helping millions of people resolve their healthcare needs with confidence. Together with our clients and partners, we are continually modernizing the healthcare experience and making high-quality healthcare a reality for more people and organizations around the world.