



## **The Courage to Care: Virtual Care and Women’s Mental Health During COVID-19**

**By Stephany Verstraete, Chief Marketing Officer at Teladoc Health**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on people across the globe, and women are bearing a significant brunt of this burden, often juggling myriad responsibilities among their individual, familial and professional lives. At a time when such a great burden is being shouldered by women, virtual mental healthcare solutions can offer flexible, affordable options where women can go for much needed care. Broader access to virtual mental healthcare for women can provide cost and time savings during an unprecedented global crisis, when access to these already finite resources is more difficult for women than ever before.

### **A disproportionate impact**

From The New York Times to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, economic reports are emphasizing the outsized impacts the pandemic is having on women. Women are overrepresented in industries that have been hit hardest by the pandemic, like food service, entertainment, and retail. As a result, the UN estimates that women’s employment is 19% more at risk than men’s in the wake of COVID-19. Among those women who remain in the workforce, one in four are considering leaving their jobs or reducing their hours as a result of burnout and/or household responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

The increased risks posed to women’s mental health as a result of economic hardship and burnout are undeniable. According to CARE, a global social justice organization, 27% of women across nearly 40 countries reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused them to experience an increase in challenges associated with mental illness — compared to just 10% of men.

Mental illness can lead to increased health risks in other areas. Clinical studies highlight the detrimental long-term effects of stress, depression, and anxiety on the body. According to the American Psychological Association, long-term ongoing stress can increase a person’s risk for:

- Hypertension
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Chronic fatigue
- Metabolic disorders (e.g., diabetes, obesity)
- Depression
- Immune disorders<sup>2</sup>

“There is no denying the link between mental health and comorbidities,” says Julia Hoffman, Vice President of Behavioral Health Strategy at Teladoc Health. “The cumulative stress faced by women during this pandemic has the potential to create public health problems that we’ll be grappling with for decades.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/body>



### **Embracing women's diverse mental health needs through virtual care**

While there is no single solution for the mental health crisis affecting women as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual healthcare offers an immediate solution to help women cope with the hardships they face in its wake.

According to the CDC, virtual healthcare has multiple benefits in the context of the pandemic and beyond.<sup>3</sup> It is highly personalized and convenient, it can expand access to whole-person care, reduce patient demand on facilities, and serve as a front door to the rest of the healthcare system.

Today's telehealth options can offer women unprecedented ways to address the added stress and anxiety so many of us are experiencing personally as a result of the pandemic. At Teladoc, 40% of the people who are using our mental health services say they wouldn't have gotten care elsewhere. Why? Because virtual mental health visits can eliminate many of the barriers that women have faced, including: affordability, much needed flexibility in scheduling, and geographic proximity to an available professional. In a global context, cultural norms may and often do dissuade or inhibit women from seeking adequate mental healthcare.<sup>4</sup>

At a point in time when the needs have arguably never been greater, because of telehealth women of all ages, cultural backgrounds or life stages are more empowered to make mental health a priority.

### **How women can access virtual healthcare services today**

The good news for women is that millions of people already have access to virtual mental healthcare services through their primary insurance. For those who don't have insurance or are underinsured, direct-to-consumer virtual mental healthcare therapy services are available and can still be considerably less expensive than traditional therapy. Whether connecting with a therapist over the phone, via video, or even through text messaging, these solutions put access in the palm of women's hands, on their terms.

We continue to see women all around us struggling to cope with the additional burdens they are shouldering as a result of the widespread impact of the pandemic. However, through virtual mental healthcare, options do exist for women to get the mental healthcare support they need in a way that is flexible, affordable, and accessible. Women who might benefit from access to these services should contact their primary health insurance provider, or go to [Teladoc.com](https://www.teladoc.com) or [BetterHelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com) to receive care today.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6943a3.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/comprehensive-womens-mental-health/ethnic-and-cultural-effects-on-mental-healthcare-for-women/6BD2288637652C9E1AF83894EB819685/core-reader>