
How To Unlock Telehealth Potential?



As telehealth continues transforming healthcare delivery, its successful implementation is based upon seamless integration. Healthcare decision-makers must develop comprehensive strategies that consider the needs of patients, providers, and other stakeholders. Failing to address these needs can result in a poor experience for both parties, undermining telehealth's potential to improve healthcare access. Here are the steps necessary to optimise telehealth integration, from assessing infrastructure readiness to synchronising platforms and collecting critical feedback.

Assessing Infrastructure: A Key to Telehealth Success

The first step in successful telehealth integration is evaluating the current infrastructure, both for healthcare providers and the patients they serve. This is especially crucial when implementing telehealth in rural or underserved areas, where technology limitations can be significant barriers. For example, a 2022 report revealed that more than one-third of patients in rural areas cited broadband and computer access as barriers to receiving care. Additionally, with over 180 rural hospitals closed since 2005 and hundreds more at risk, telehealth can provide vital healthcare access in these communities—provided that the infrastructure supports it.

Health systems must address these challenges head-on, ensuring that telehealth platforms are designed to function smoothly even with limited technological resources. Providers should also prioritise platforms compatible with various devices, particularly smartphones, as many users find mobile internet access more reliable than home connections. Moreover, eliminating unnecessary features in the telehealth interface can help reduce crashes and connectivity issues, making the system more user-friendly for patients and clinicians.

Synchronising Telehealth Platforms with Existing Systems

One of the critical components of telehealth integration is ensuring that telehealth platforms can work seamlessly with other healthcare systems, such as electronic health records (EHR). While telehealth has been widely adopted—nearly 85% of physicians have used it—many providers still face barriers when accessing all necessary data through their current platforms. In fact, less than half of providers reported being able to pull information from various databases into their EHR systems. Moreover, a majority lack the tools to automatically collect and deliver patient data, creating inefficiencies in care.

To address these issues, healthcare systems should explore software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions. These purpose-built tools allow for seamless integration of multiple data sources, ensuring that providers have access to complete patient information during telehealth visits. SaaS solutions are also more affordable and easier to implement than traditional software systems. By collaborating with vendors offering healthcare SaaS products, decision-makers can ensure a more streamlined, efficient telehealth experience for patients and providers.

Testing and Gathering Feedback: A Crucial Step

Even the best-designed telehealth platforms need rigorous testing before they are fully deployed. Conducting usability tests during the integration process allows teams to identify pain points and areas for improvement before launching the system. Research suggests that platforms that are easy to use significantly boost patient satisfaction. A 2023 study, for example, found that patients were much more likely to report a positive telehealth experience when they found the platform easy to navigate.

Usability testing should go beyond superficial evaluations and include detailed feedback from both patients and healthcare providers. Tools that track how users interact with the platform—such as the specific features they click on or parts of the interface that cause confusion—can provide valuable insights. Additionally, after the platform goes live, development teams should continue to gather feedback through patient surveys. If

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many users indicate they are unlikely to use the system again, understanding their reasons is critical to making the necessary improvements.

Poor integration is one of the primary factors holding back telehealth's full potential. To ensure a telehealth programme succeeds, decision-makers must focus on infrastructure readiness, system compatibility, and user experience. By addressing these critical factors and continuously gathering feedback from users, healthcare providers can unlock telehealth's full potential, providing more accessible, efficient care for patients and making the process smoother for clinicians. As telehealth becomes a permanent fixture in modern healthcare, these steps will help ensure its long-term success.

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