



Library Toolkit

Dear New Jersey Libraries,

We encourage you to participate in NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary to promote health equity and provide telehealth services to your community. This toolkit was created for you and your library patrons to access credible multilingual health information that aims to contribute to patient empowerment through health literacy.

Introduction by

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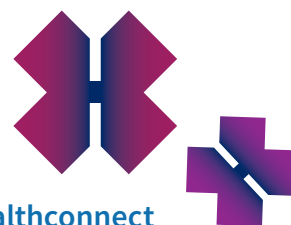
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Telehealth visits have become a widely accepted and mainstream way of leveling the playing field in healthcare access by virtue of its convenience, portability, and affordability that changes the patient/doctor relationship for the better. NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary empowers librarians to help immigrants, seniors, and economically disadvantaged families who unjustly bear the consequences of poor health. Many cannot make informed decisions because they do not own a computer, making access to timely, online health information and telehealth support difficult. Others experience language barriers and communication challenges related to low health literacy. Lifestyle constraints, such as working irregular or nighttime shifts, prohibit many people – especially immigrants – from accessing health care during regular visiting hours, contributing to later-stage diagnoses and disease progression.

The COVID pandemic put a spotlight on inequities in the healthcare system, especially among the most vulnerable. People's lives were put at risk simply because of where they live, work, and play. Other social determinants of health include their age, the language they speak, labor jobs filled by immigrants, lack of health insurance, and lack of access to technology or trustworthy health information. Ordinary individuals living in the most at-risk communities need access to a complex network of healthcare resources and trusted information. Without such access they are denied the right to make educated healthcare decisions to advocate for their own health and the health of their loved ones.

Telemedicine is here to stay. Demand for this service only continues to grow. Libraries have an important role to play by integrating telehealth into their core services which also requires cooperation between health systems, community-based organizations, and healthcare workers. It can be used to perform basic doctor-patient interactions, such as diagnosing physical and mental health conditions more quickly at a lower cost, sharing and reviewing test results on patient portals,





holding productive and interactive discussions online with doctors, and obtaining vital health information in order to make informed decisions about one's health. Telemedicine visits have become a widely accepted and mainstream way of leveling the playing field in healthcare access among at-risk individuals by virtue of its convenience, portability, and affordability.

Why we chose this model of Telemedicine

There is a need for public libraries to play a role in advancing health equity through [NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary](#). This program addresses barriers to access through a combination of technology that offers links to telemedicine, apps for doctor conferences and job interviews, and COVID and health literacy resources. [NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary](#) supports the [government's Healthy People 2023](#) mission to help people get timely, high-quality health care services so that good health is within the grasp of everyone.

We thoroughly researched the various telehealth models libraries were using through the [National Telehealth in Libraries Working Group](#). We spoke to library systems in other states on the pros and cons of standalone telehealth booths, private rooms set up with computers, monitors, and health monitoring equipment such as blood pressure cuffs, glucometers, pulse oximeters, thermometers. We focused on providing the best health literacy services with the least amount of work for librarians—especially those in small, under-funded and understaffed libraries that were located in the kind of communities we wanted to reach. We strived to create an easy to implement program that is scalable no matter how large or small the library.

Ultimately, we decided on using iPads for a number of reasons:

- They were relatively affordable.
- They were easy to use for both librarians and patrons with low digital literacy skills.
- Many of the most important telehealth apps could not be used on laptops such as Chromebooks.

Project Goal

[NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary](#) uniquely positions New Jersey's public libraries alongside hospitals, doctors, and practitioners to improve community health and wellness. It promotes health equity to individuals who reside in communities of need who lack access to medical providers or health information due to financial or lifestyle constraints or language barriers. [NJHealthConnect@YourLibrary](#) brings statewide recognition that libraries, with their vast community networks and accessibility, have an opportunity to bring health equity to "at-risk" communities, validating the need to access to health resources around the social determinants of health.



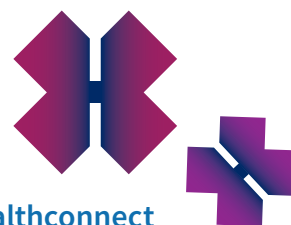
Acknowledgements

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Mental Health Crisis in America*

Mental health services in the U.S. are insufficient despite more than half of Americans seeking help. Limited options and long waits are the norm, but there are some bright spots, with the majority of Americans now seeing mental health as important as physical health. The root of the problem is lack of access – or the ability to find care.

The demand for mental health services is stronger than ever, with nearly six in 10 Americans seeking or wanting to seek mental health services either for themselves or for a loved one. These individuals are skewing younger and are more likely to be of lower income and have a military background. The large majority of Americans (76%) also believe mental health is just as important as physical health.

Common Barriers Remain Despite Strong Demand for Mental Health Services

Despite this strong demand and growing societal awareness of the importance of mental health in the U.S., the study revealed that the overwhelming majority of Americans do not believe such services are accessible for everyone, and about half believe options are limited. These beliefs are driven by several perceived barriers in Americans' ability to seek mental health treatment, including:

- **High Cost and Insufficient Insurance Coverage:** Cost and poor insurance coverage are seen as the top barriers for accessing mental health care. One in four Americans reported having to choose between getting mental health treatment and paying for daily necessities.
- **Limited Options and Long Waits:** Access to face-to-face services is a higher priority for Americans seeking mental health treatment than access to medication. Ninety-six million Americans, or 38%, have had to wait longer than one week for mental health treatments. And nearly half of Americans have had to or know someone who has had to drive more than an hour roundtrip to seek treatment. While most Americans have heard of telehealth as an option for treating mental health issues, only 7% have reported using it. When asked if they would be open to using it, almost half of Americans who have not already tried telehealth services said they would be open to the idea of trying a service to address a current or future mental health need.



- **Lack of Awareness:** While most Americans do try to seek out treatment, there also is a large portion of the population who have wanted to but did not seek treatment for themselves or loved ones in part due to not knowing where to go if they needed this service. What's more, fifty-three million American adults have wanted to see a professional but were unable to for reasons outside of their control. Furthermore, younger Americans (i.e., Gen Z and Millennials) are less sure about resources for mental health services, compared to older generations. This younger generation was also more likely to find it too hard to figure out legitimate resources online. Instead, many turned to unreliable resources for information, including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.
- **Social Stigma:** Nearly one-third of Americans have worried about others judging them when they told them they have sought mental health services, and over a fifth of the population, have even lied to avoid telling people they were seeking mental health services. This stigma is particularly true for younger Americans, who are more likely to have worried about others judging them when they say they have sought mental health services (i.e. 49% Gen Z vs. 40% Millennials vs. 30% Gen X vs. 20% Boomers).

There is also a large disparity in access to mental health care based on level of income and location. Individuals located in rural areas and of lower-income are less likely to say that mental health services are extremely accessible to them.

Compared to middle- and high-income households, low-income Americans are less likely to know where to go for treatment and more likely to use a community center verses a qualified mental health center. Of the Americans that have not sought mental health treatment, more than half were in low-income households.

In addition, compared to Americans living in urban and suburban areas, individuals living in rural areas are less likely to proactively seek mental health specialists they need, and instead go to their primary care doctor or community center for treatment. Rural Americans are also less accepting of mental health services and care.

* Statistics taken from the Cohen Veterans Network, a national not-for-profit philanthropic organization, and National Council for Mental Wellbeing that delivers mental health and addiction treatment and services **2023 Study Reveals Lack of Access as Root Cause for Mental Health Crisis in America.**

