Optum

Virtual urgent care scheduling for a telehealth platform



The situation

Getting sick is rarely a planned event – consumers can need care at any time, day or night. Virtual care, also known as telehealth, may be a convenient option for consumers who suddenly find themselves or a loved one ill.

Optum® Patient Access and Engagement partnered with a telehealth provider organization to develop a virtual care platform that includes self-service online scheduling. Through this platform, eligible patients can chat with a provider 24/7 for their urgent and primary care needs.

The initiative

Working in tandem with the telehealth provider organization, Optum brought together the needed components to make virtual care a convenient and accessible option for many patients.

To date, there have been hundreds of thousands of virtual care visits scheduled using the **Patient Access and Engagement** platform.

The market need

While most consumers and members know when they're sick and need care, barriers exist that may prevent them from scheduling a visit, including not knowing where to look, unavailable primary care providers or long hold times.



The program was first piloted in 16 states and had expanded to all 50 states by spring 2022 for both virtual urgent and primary care.

For instance, 76% of consumers are interested in using virtual care.[1] Its convenience, cost savings and reduction of typical barriers versus in-person care delivery may point to why most are positive toward telehealth. For providers, it's noteworthy to see that 36% of consumers state that they would leave their current doctor for one who offers telehealth services,[2] and nearly a third prefer virtual to in-person visits.[3]

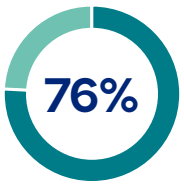
Using health care technology to address the interest and demand for virtual care was a top consideration for the telehealth provider organization. But there were many IT issues that needed to be solved – including creating a system that integrated directly with the provider's EMR, using existing operational and clinical workflows, keeping wait times for an appointment low, and enabling a 24/7 self-guided scheduling solution for member care access.

The solution

For virtual health care to function smoothly, consumers and patients must have a simple, straightforward way to search for and schedule virtual care appointments. **Patient Access and Engagement** offers an online scheduling platform that integrates directly with the provider's electronic medical records and practice management system.

After defining technical requirements, Optum was able to stand up its platform in support of the telehealth provider organization. As a result, virtual care scheduling is accessible nationwide to consumers/patients via multiple front doors. Patient care access and engagement has expanded and is delivering compelling results.

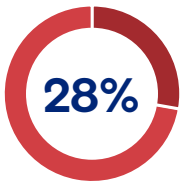
Post peak-pandemic, the health care industry is poised for technological innovation:



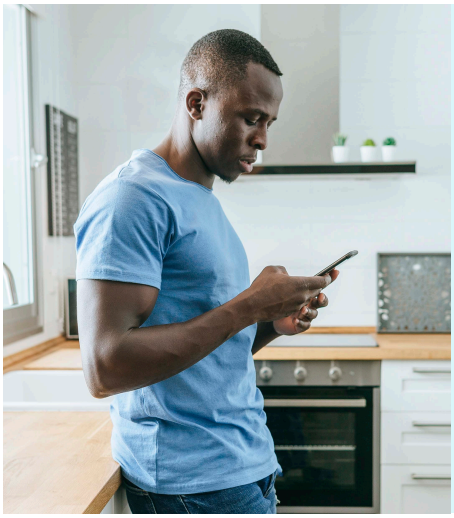
of consumers are interested in using virtual care.[1]



would leave their current doctor for one who offered telehealth services.[2]



prefer virtual visits to in-person visits.[3]



"With online scheduling for virtual care, patients can be quickly matched to the right provider and then book the appointment right from their mobile phone or laptop. When the appointment time comes, the patient can have the virtual visit right from the comfort of their own home. We believe this approach is creating a positive patient and consumer experience."

– Executive leader of a major telehealth provider organization

1. McKinsey. Telehealth: A quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID-19 reality? mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/telehealth-a-quarter-trillion-dollar-post-covid-19-reality#. May 29, 2020.
2. Sage Growth/Blackbook Research. COVID-19 Market Pulse. March 2020.
3. Optum Telehealth Consumer Research. 2020.



Flexible platform was quickly adjusted based on trends

Many individuals use virtual urgent care for rapid treatment of health concerns such as migraines, rashes, ear/eye infections, cold and flu. Heightened demand for urgent care during the pandemic led primary care providers to shift resources to see urgent care patients. To accommodate this shift, Optum updated the clinical decision workflows within its online scheduling platform.

The benefits

Patients

- Real-time provider availability
- Self-service: convenient 24/7 access, intuitive to use
- Patient choice based on provider demographics (race/ethnicity, gender, language, ratings)
- Actionable reminders based on patient communication preferences (text or email)

Providers

- Flexible and sophisticated algorithms based on provider clinical and operational rules
- Addition of new patients and increase in revenue
- No additional system required
- Savings on administrative costs
- Reduced no-shows
- Easing of stress on staff

Health care organization

- Better utilization of high-quality providers to drive better outcomes
- Optimized scheduling to address workforce shortages and burnout
- Support of actionable next step for gap in care closure and clinical intervention
- Increased use and value for health insurer's portal/app, triggering repeat users and higher engagement
- Improved brand perception and market-competitive advantage

Alerts and notifications added

Prior to this engagement, online self-scheduling was not being used as a key element of an urgent care delivery model. Therefore, digital scheduling needed to quickly add alert and monitoring functionality. In parallel to implementing online scheduling for the telehealth provider organization, unique operational and clinical workflows and a 24/7 support structure for alerts and monitoring also had to be developed.

Custom alerts to suit the needs of an on-demand care platform were created, which included wait time alerts that inform site administrators if the wait time for a virtual urgent care visit exceeds state thresholds. This allowed the client to comply with its urgent care delivery quality metrics.

The **Patient Access and Engagement** platform infrastructure warns the support team of throughput spikes or capacity issues that could lead to slow response times and a bad user experience. Likewise, the online scheduling platform improved auto-scaling capabilities to respond to alerts with increased resources. Optum frequently flags potential issues for the client so they can react to operational challenges before they escalate.

The results

Online scheduling has enabled this telehealth provider to grow rapidly – starting with 100 online bookings and growing up to 1,800 bookings in one day. Ninety percent of bookings occur the same or next day for either primary or urgent care. The demand for virtual care visits continues to be strong. This trend is reflected nationally, as pent-up demand for health care service continues, and because satisfaction with virtual care delivery is high. In a recent nationwide survey of 2,000 individuals, 79% said they were satisfied with their telehealth visit.[4]

Enabling convenient care access

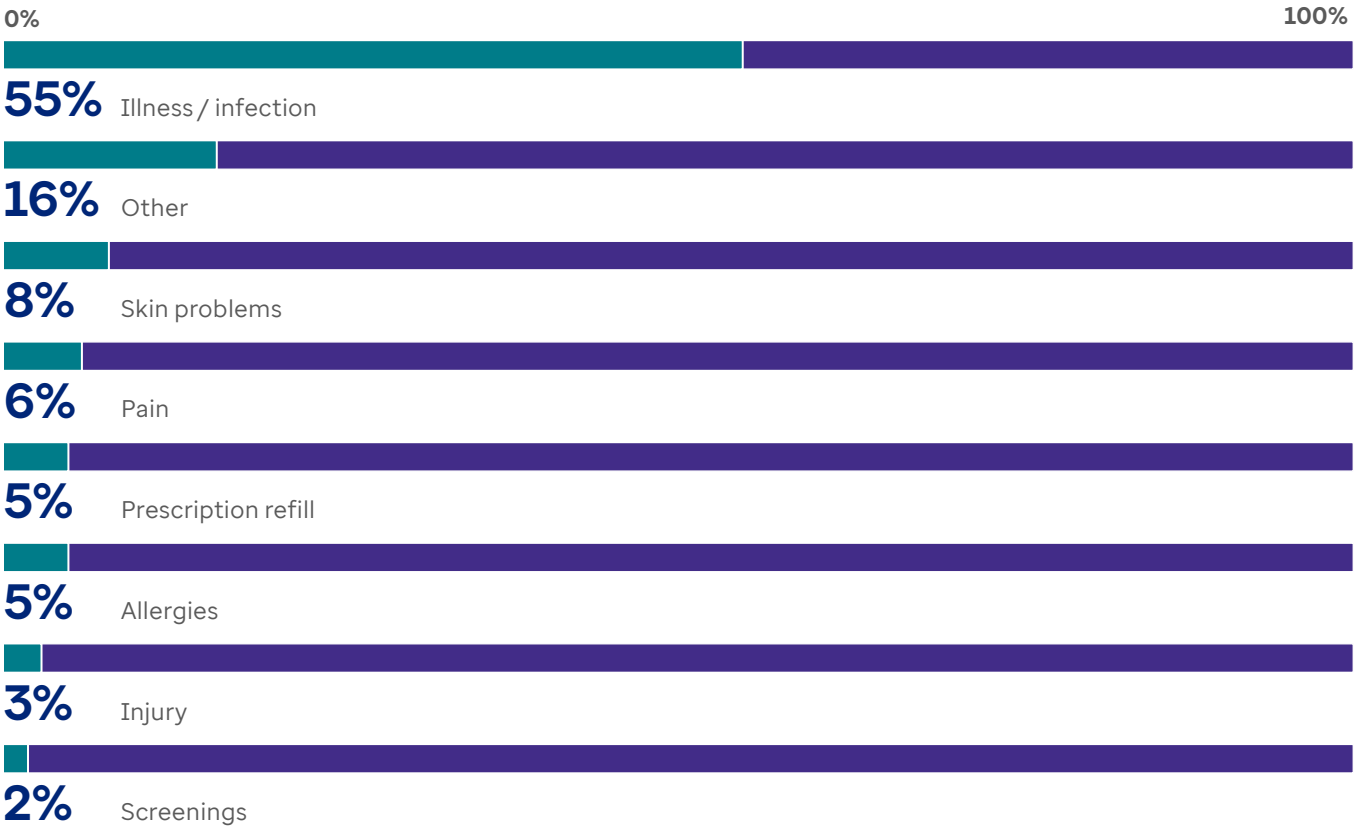
The client saw many patients take advantage of the convenience of 24/7 self-scheduling. Fifty-eight percent of the bookings were performed after normal business hours, which is helpful for consumers who do not have time to book an appointment during the day, or who suddenly become ill and need to talk to a provider quickly.

Additionally, nearly 97% of those seeking urgent care services had only a 1-day lead time, meaning they were booked for a same-day appointment. Furthermore, wait time (i.e., the time a patient must wait in the platform to attend the first available appointment) is as low as 3 minutes, and on average 13.47 minutes across the states the telehealth provider organization serves.

> “Our virtual care program, along with online scheduling, enables simple and straightforward access to care. Our providers are seeing over 1,000 patients per day across the program. Optum has enabled virtual urgent care access for patients in need – and we have plans to continue to expand the program.”
>
> **– Chief operations officer, major telehealth provider organization**

4. COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition. COVID-19 telehealth impact study. Patient survey analysis. April 11, 2021. c19hcc.org/telehealth/.

Care visit reasons



These results demonstrate how members are booking care when the majority of those seeking care are suffering from an illness/infection. Behind these numbers is the fact that this data represents real people with real health care needs – needs that may have otherwise been delayed or gone unmet. Optum, with this national telehealth provider organization, is helping members find and book care when they are at their most vulnerable.

The future

Due to the success of the initial program, the client plans to grow the virtual care capability – adding tens of thousands of providers on the platform, expanding visit reasons and increasing the member population.

Interested in learning how online scheduling may help your health system or provider group expand its patient base?

Click here to complete the **Request Demo** form.

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