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VA expands access to telehealth services during COVID-19 pandemic for older, rural and homeless Veterans

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today its [Digital Divide Consult](#) has helped more than 12,000 Veterans obtain internet access or a video-capable device for their health care needs.

As part of the program, VA providers refer Veterans to a VA social worker, who determines eligibility for various programs to assist with getting the internet service or technology needed for VA telehealth — ensuring older Veterans, those living in rural areas and Veterans who are homeless or in temporary housing have the opportunity to participate.

According to the [Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association](#), Veterans with lower incomes, more severe disabilities and more chronic conditions are more likely to use virtual care during the pandemic; but Veterans older than 45 and Veterans who are homeless or who live in rural areas are less likely to use video care. The Digital Divide Consult provides a solution for these Veterans to access video care when needed.

“The pandemic has tested VA’s workforce like never before, and innovations like the Digital Divide Consult highlight the ingenuity and resilience that have been hallmarks of the department’s successful response to this national emergency,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As our virtual care infrastructure continually improves, so does the quality and accessibility of Veterans’ care.”

VA’s Digital Divide Consult and other initiatives are prime reasons the use of telehealth services by Veterans continues to rise. In mid-November, a total of 196,116 telehealth video visits to Veterans in their homes or other off-site locations were completed over a seven-day period, representing a 1,653% increase in weekly [VA Video Connect](#) visits since the end of February. The number of video appointments held per day peaked at more than 41,000.

To further enable Veterans to participate in telehealth, VA facilities are establishing test-call services to support Veterans ahead of their first video visit. Additionally, [VA is partnering with Microsoft’s Airband initiative](#) to educate Veterans on essential digital skills. VA intends to update the Digital Divide Consult as opportunities for future broadband and device discounts become available.

Learn more about [VA telehealth](#).

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