



**The Benefits of Telehealth  
Primary Care Services for  
Patients with  
Neurodevelopmental and  
Intellectual Disabilities  
during COVID-19**

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# The Gap

The pandemic created mass inaccessibility of primary care

Patients who identify as neurodivergent were stripped of their resources during the brunt onset of the pandemic

Lack of research on effect of COVID-19 on primary health care services for neurodevelopmental or intellectual disability



# Literature Review: *The Reality*

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Autistic patients may have experienced delays in processing information which impacts their ability to respond to the fast-changing pace of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>

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70% of autistic patients reported interruptions to standard health and social services.<sup>2</sup>

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Those with intellectual disabilities faced a mortality rate of 2.75 times when compared to the general population following a COVID-19 diagnosis.<sup>3</sup>

1. Baweja et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2016

2. Oakley et al. 2021

3. (Gleason et al. 2021).



# Methods and Limitations

- 6 semi-structured interviews with clinicians and primary care providers
- Interviewees interact with neurodivergent patients regularly
- Limitations
  - Limited geographical coverage



# Interview Questions

- Questions focused on:
  - Clinician perspectives of patient experiences of telehealth services
  - Understanding the challenges faced by clinicians when transitioning to telehealth services



# Notable Themes

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Physicians reported their patients feeling generally more comfortable with telehealth as opposed to in person healthcare

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Outstanding patient satisfaction and preference towards telehealth services



## Notable Themes (cont)

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Though telehealth has proved beneficial, there **is unchanging need for in-person healthcare services**

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Some claimed telehealth visits provides additional information about the patient, while some thought the opposite



## Quotes

"The best part about the telehealth visits is a window into the world of the patient"

"The convenience factor is really the primary reason that patients choose to continue to do virtual visits [...] if they are healthy, I only need to see them once a year."

"In the clinic, patients will start to talk about things they didn't necessarily plan to talk about and you can really gain a lot of information that way."



# Discussion and Future Applications


- Continued implementation of telehealth services
- **Guidance to widen and sustain accessibility to necessary services**
- **Maintain flexibility for both clinicians and patients**



# Thank you!!

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# Questions for the audience

- Were there other themes that you were curious about that I didn't cover?
- What future directions would you like to see this research going in?
- Would you be interested in a study about direct patient perspectives?