Introduction

- Telehealth allows patients to connect with professionals regardless of distance.
- Due to the pandemic, the usage of telehealth increased significantly from 1% to 13% of all outpatient visits.
- In Colorado, psychiatric visits were the highest, amassing 31% of all telehealth visits.
- **Objective:** Compare and contrast the effects of increased telehealth usage on rural and urban counties in Colorado to identify areas of high need and resource shortages.

Methods

- Telehealth service information was taken from the CIVHC CO APCD community dataset.
  - Information included: payer, provider types, diagnoses, and geographic variations.
- Behavioural health provider information was retrieved from a biannual survey from the health access branch at CDPane.
- Qualitative interviews were conducted over zoom and notes were taken for 2 licensed professional counselors to better understand personal struggles and benefits with telehealth.
- **Measures:**
  - Non-mental health v.s. mental health diagnoses
  - Age: to consider if telehealth is benefiting children or adults more
  - Payer types: to identify if patients in rural environments have various options
  - Provider types: to compare primary care and behavioural health.

Examples from Qualitative Interviews

- "Chronic health issues are best treated by telehealth because it takes longer to build rapport.
  - Participant 1
- "While most clinical services can be conducted normally, play therapy can’t be effectively conducted through telehealth."
  - Participant 2

Conclusion

- Both rural and urban counties had a similar increase in telehealth services per capita.
- The number of children (under 18) visits in rural was much lower than in urban counties.
- There are more Medicaid payers seeking telehealth services in rural counties than commercial payers.
- Alamosa has a high number of behavioural health providers and correlates to the highest number of telehealth services.
- Out of the top 10 counties, only 1 county is rural (Huerfano), ranking at 5th.
- For future directions, one can measure retention and specific types of diagnosis that benefited more from telehealth.
- According to qualitative interviews, telehealth is still beneficial post pandemic.
- Efforts should be made to improve access to telehealth for rural counties.

References and Acknowledgements

For more information on the datasets and references used, please scan this QR code.