



Behavioral Telehealth Visits in Colorado Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic



Qinxiao Wu¹, BS, Reina Doyle², MPH, Bruno Anthony², PhD,

The Psychiatry Undergraduate Research Program and Learning Experience (PURPLE)¹, Department of Psychiatry, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus², Partners in Children's Mental Health²

Introduction

- Telehealth allow 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 CDPHE.
- 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 are given various options
 - Provider types to compare primary care and behavioural health.

Results

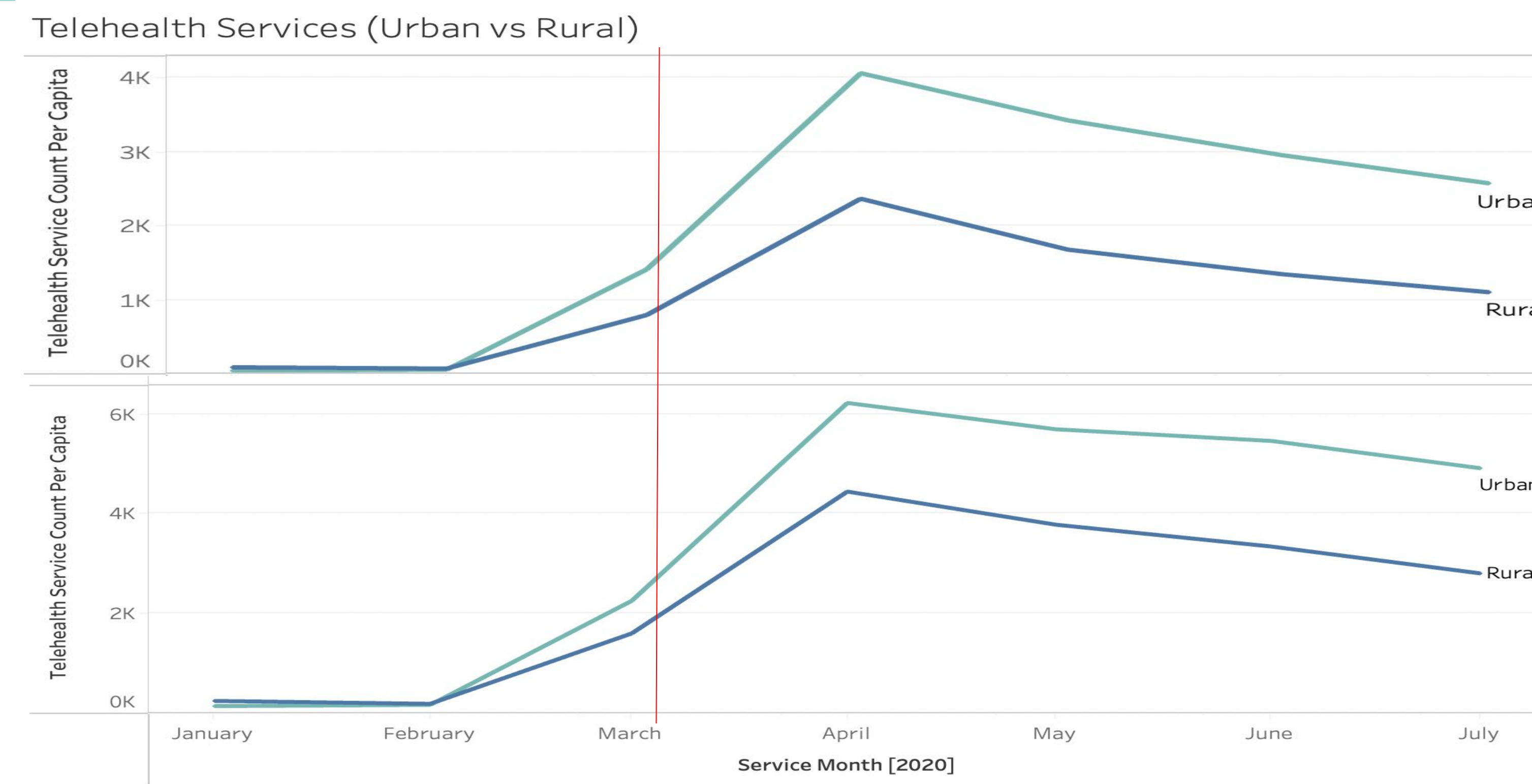


Fig 1. Telehealth Services(Urban vs Rural) Count of total mental illness telehealth services and per 100,000 people sorted by urban or rural. All ages(bottom). Under 18(top).Red line is the pandemic start.

Map of Behavioural Health Providers by County (2019)

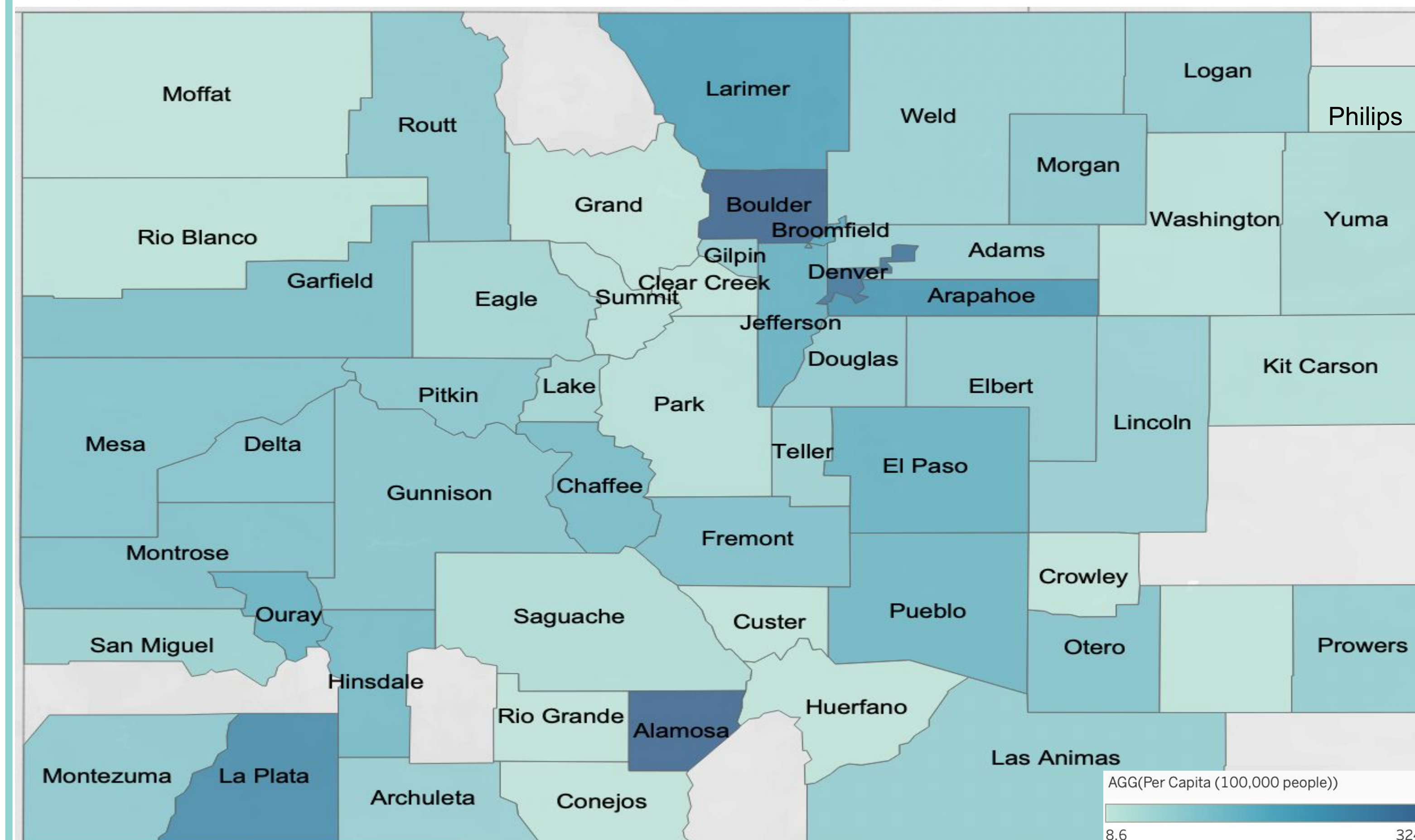


Fig 2. Behavioural Health Providers By County Per Capita

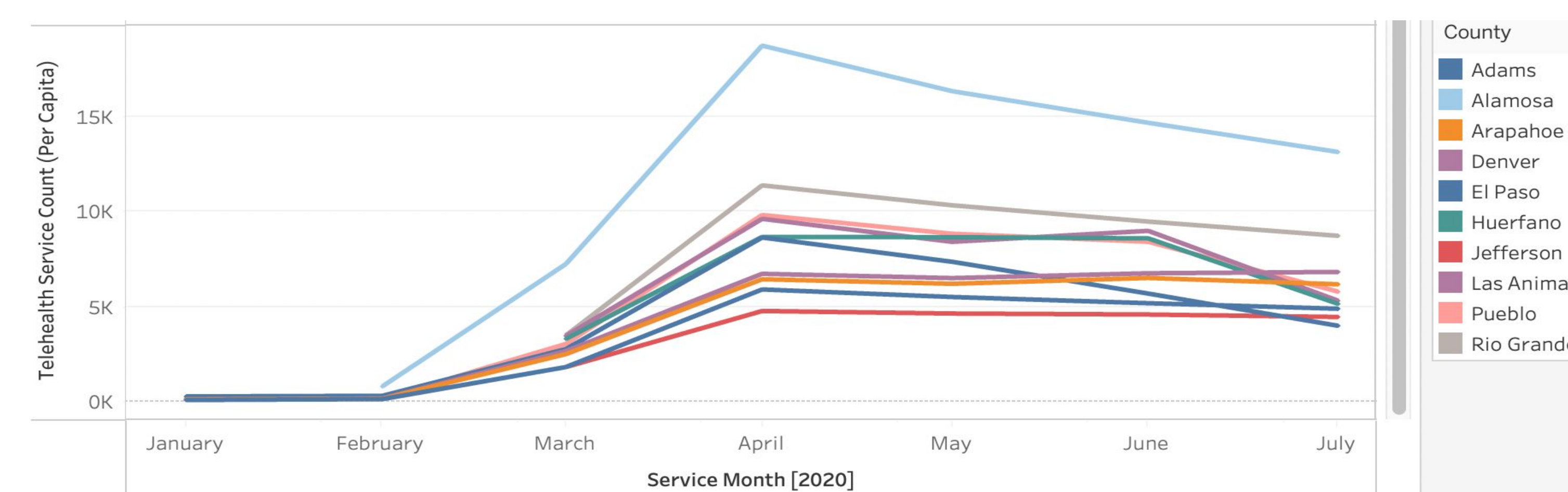


Fig 3. Number of Telehealth Services Provided by Behavioural Health Staff per capita ranked by top 10 counties

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