



How Digital Care Improves Activation in Older Home Health Patients

By MedBridge

Overview

The healthcare industry is currently undergoing a seismic shift, integrating hybrid digital patient care solutions to keep up with increasing regulatory and market demands. But as new digital models continue to evolve and expand in popularity, one of the fastest growing patient populations is at risk of being left behind: older adults. However, research shows that not only are older adults willing to engage with digital care, it can lead to impressive improvements in home health patient activation.

In this eBook we'll cover:

- 1 Why older adults are being excluded from the digital healthcare revolution and how to fix this trend.
- 2 Important ways that older adults are embracing and benefiting from digital care solutions.
- 3 Which digital care tools provide the most benefit for older home health patients.

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Are Older Adults Being Left Behind in the Digital Healthcare Revolution?

With digital patient care technologies like telehealth, digital home exercise programs (HEPs), and remote monitoring surging in popularity, the healthcare industry is currently undergoing a digital revolution. But as adoption increases industry-wide, older adults are in danger of being left behind due to a harmful yet prevalent stereotype that they aren't interested in or capable of participating in digital care due to an inability to effectively interact with technology.

According to internal MedBridge data, in a sample of 534,236 patients served in the 60 to 69 age range, only 20 percent (106,847) were offered a digital program. That means that a majority of that patient group weren't given the option to experience the benefits that digital programs can offer. If these trends continue, the problem will only become more significant as the population of older adults in the U.S. grows. According to data from the US Census Bureau, the number of people aged 65 and older in the United States has grown from 35 million in 2000 to approximately 55 million in 2020.¹

People aged 65 and older are also statistically living longer, and with the younger cohort of Baby Boomers becoming Medicare-eligible in the next decade, Medicare spending is expected to more than double over the next decade due to increased enrollment and health care costs.² As a result, digital care will become even more important as a tool for managing this older patient population and ensuring proper access to care. But if older adults aren't even being offered digital care, providers will struggle to keep up with this increased demand.

Older Adults Aren't Always Given the Chance to Use Digital Care

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Older Adults Are More Tech-Savvy Than You Might Think

The Silent Generation, those born between 1928 and 1945, and Baby Boomers, those born in the period roughly between 1946 and 1964, have an outdated reputation of being incapable of grasping the technological advances that have defined the past 25 years. According to a research study by Nielsen Norman Group,³ “Digital products still discriminate against seniors. Content written for and by older people is difficult to find—and when this content is available, it often treats seniors as a niche interest group rather than a diverse and growing demographic.”

But older adults are more capable of using technology than many people give them credit for. For example, Baby Boomers—who are currently aged between 59 and 77—have a wide diversity of experience with technology. After all, many of the most popular apps and devices are hardly brand new: The world got its hands on the first iPads in 2010, and YouTube streamed its first funny cat video almost 20 years ago, when younger Boomers were in their 30s. And according to data from the Pew Research Center, 96 percent of those aged 50 to 64 and 75 percent of those aged 65 and older are online.⁴ Sure, most older adults aren’t using technology the same way as their younger counterparts (don’t expect grandpa to bust out the latest TikTok dance), but they are using technology effectively on their own terms, even if the font size on the screen might be a little bigger.



Who is really online?

96 percent of those ages 50 to 64 are online, along with **75 percent** of those aged 65 and older.³

Older Adults Are More Tech-Savvy Than You Might Think

Continued

As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age into Medicare qualification, one of the largest health-related goals is the strong desire to age in place. According to a recent Aging in Place survey, a whopping 93 percent of respondents agreed that aging in place is an important goal for them.⁵ Of the reasons that people over the age of 55 may choose to incorporate health-related technologies into their day-to-day routines, 49 percent of the respondents claim that general aging is their primary reason.⁶ In order to ensure they're able to age in place for as long as possible, many older adults are willing to adopt new health-related technologies to make this process as safe and enjoyable as possible.

Approximately 53 percent of U.S. adults aged 55 and older currently use some type of assistive or health-related technology,⁷ and of the 47 percent surveyed who say they don't currently use assistive or health-related technologies, the overwhelming majority (70 percent), responded that they simply didn't feel that they needed them yet. But of those who do use them, two of the most widely used technologies by respondents include medical or health-related mobile apps (25 percent) and wearable medical or health-related trackers (17 percent).⁸

And when older adults are using digital patient care, data supports that their activation increases, too. According to internal MedBridge data, when patients are prescribed home programs electronically, activation dramatically increases across age ranges, but would you believe that the highest activation rates—63 percent—occurred in ages 60 to 79? Going back to that sample of 534,236 patients served in the 60 to 69 age range, only 20 percent (106,847) were offered a digital program by their provider. Given the 63 percent overall activation rate in that age group, if the remaining 427,389 were offered digital programs and 63 percent of those activated, you could potentially see increased activation in **269,255 more patients.**

Our internal data also found that when you incorporate remote monitoring techniques, activation is driven even higher—up to 81 percent in ages 60 to 69 and 83 percent in ages 70 to 79! How would your patient care and quality markers improve if you could engage patients at this rate? When you put it all together, the dramatic boost in patient activation can have significant downstream effects, from better patient satisfaction and functional outcomes to improved quality scores and reimbursements.

63%

of participants aged 60 – 79 increased their activation when prescribed home programs electronically.

81%

of participants aged 60 – 69 increased their activation when RTM techniques were incorporated.

83%

of participants aged 70 – 79 increased their activation when RTM techniques were incorporated.



How Digital Patient Care Improves Patient Activation in Older Adults

Now that you've seen the results, let's look at a few of the digital patient care tools that can make it all possible.

Online Home Exercise Programs

Twenty-six million physical therapy visits were conducted with Medicare beneficiaries in 2021.⁹ With this volume of patients to manage, home exercise programs (HEPs) are an essential way to ensure care continuity and access to care between in-person visits. Many agencies are beginning to assign home programs digitally to help better engage patients and empower them to stay on track with their exercises.

HEPs that include features such as pain and difficulty monitoring and the ability to track patient progress can help clinicians better assess how patients are doing and reach out to help with any obstacles before they become larger. By allowing agencies to provide high-quality therapy to a larger number of patients, HEPs help agencies provide better care and maximize reimbursements under the home health value-based care (HHVBP) model.

Online Patient Education

For home health patients, engaging with care plans independently between home visits is key to optimizing outcomes. Yet many high-risk patients, such as those with chronic diseases like COPD, heart failure, and diabetes, don't have the skills or knowledge they need to effectively manage their condition. Online patient education can help patients manage their disease and even slow its progression by providing engaging, easy-to-understand information on topics such as:

- The name of the diagnosed condition, along with symptoms, anticipated tests and treatments, prognosis, and complications.
- Required medications, schedules, and treatment timeframes.
- Dietary restrictions, allowances, and recommended menus.
- Understanding how to perform the exercises safely.
- When to check in with their home health nurse or primary physician versus going to the emergency room.
- Energy conservation techniques.
- Behaviors that improve health such as stopping smoking, reducing alcohol, and managing weight.

When patients better understand their condition, they're more likely to ask questions during home visits that can better guide effective care. In the meantime, clinicians can follow up using tools like telehealth and two-way messaging to answer questions from patients and ensure that they are managing their conditions as well as possible, helping to minimize disease progression along with potential ED and acute care visits.

Patient Mobile Apps

Smartphone ownership has increased dramatically in recent years, with 96 percent of adults ages 50 to 65 and 75 percent of adults ages 65 and over utilizing the technology.¹⁰ Digital patient care is right there waiting for them in their pocket—all we have to do is unlock its potential! Patient mobile apps are a convenient way to let patients access their care plans, view their progress, and communicate with their providers between visits. In fact, one study found 82 percent of patients indicated mobile apps had a positive impact on their ability to engage in exercise activity.¹⁰ Why? The ability to improve patient engagement through gamification, push notifications, and two-way messaging—not to mention better communication between patients and clinicians—results in a stronger therapeutic alliance.



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of patients indicated mobile apps had a positive impact on their ability to engage in exercise activity.¹¹



Best Practices for Engaging Older Adults in Digital Care

Despite high activation rates once older adults get started with digital care, the initial buy-in phase for older adults can be slower to progress. Part of the reason is because the tools can initially feel unfamiliar, and many new technologies are designed by those on the younger end of the spectrum.

Successfully engaging older adults in new technologies requires stepping into their shoes with design elements that accommodate an aging population such as clear language, large fonts, and images or video illustrating steps. To help your older patients engage with—and stay engaged with—technology, it's important to ensure that your digital care tools and accompanying help materials are as accessible as possible for them. Here are some best practices:

Best Practices for Engaging Older Adults in Digital Care

Give every patient who you think would benefit from digital care the option to engage online.

Explain to your patients which digital tools are available to them. Follow up with what their benefits are, both in person and with educational materials.

Provide instructional materials. Make sure they are concise, clear, and accessible.

Use easy-to-understand language. Avoid technical jargon. If you direct users to access additional content via QR codes or app stores, be sure to also include clear explanations for how to do so.

Incorporate images. Visuals help better explain and illustrate steps.





How MedBridge Can Help

Meet the needs of your patients, no matter their age, with the comprehensive MedBridge Digital Patient Engagement Solution for Home Health Agencies. Our best-in-class virtual patient engagement tools and evidence-based clinical and patient education are designed to improve communication and access to care, enhance patient self-efficacy, and increase patient activation and adherence. Our platform includes:

- ✓ **HEP Program Builder**
Engage patients with an easily accessible and customizable library with thousands of video exercises developed by industry professionals.
- ✓ **MedBridge GO**
Engage patients and promote adherence by prescribing home exercises in easy daily doses and allowing patients to reach out with questions or concerns.
- ✓ **Patient Education**
Help patients understand their diagnosis and rehabilitation plan with engaging education to encourage them to effectively manage their care plan.
- ✓ **Two-Way messaging**
Bridge the patient-provider divide with two-way messaging capabilities that boost the therapeutic alliance.
- ✓ **Telehealth Virtual Visits**
Supplement in-person visits for low-risk patients with effective, user-friendly telehealth tools.



Conclusion

The coming influx of Medicare-eligible adults in the next 10 years is going to be one of the defining challenges the healthcare industry faces over the next several decades. Digital care innovations and hybrid-care models offer a promising solution, but only if we cast aside our preconceived notions and make them available to all. Simply put, the human and financial cost of leaving older adults behind in the digital healthcare boom is something we can't afford. The good news? Older adults are more adept at utilizing technology than their reputation, and are open to using the technology that has the power to revolutionize the healthcare industry—if we give them a fair chance.

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ABOUT MEDBRIDGE

Combining powerful digital patient care tools with the highest quality education, MedBridge is committed to making healthcare better for both providers and patients. Organizations across the care continuum use MedBridge to provide an enriched, digitally enabled experience that engages patients while streamlining and simplifying care. Designed with over a decade of insight from more than 300,000 clinicians and 25 million patients, MedBridge has helped thousands of organizations realize better patient outcomes. [Learn more.](#)

See how MedBridge can help your organization.

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