

FROM EVIDENCE TO IMPACT



Video Transcript

Health equity in telehealth is the opportunity for everyone to receive the health care they need and deserve, regardless of social or economic status. Telehealth is an important tool to improve access to care for racially and culturally diverse communities. In this new [6-minute video](#), we hear from subject-matter experts about the acceleration of tele-mental health innovation to bridge access gaps.

“It is unlikely that we will see a full return to traditional in-person mental health service models. Evolving patient preferences, provider attitudes and capacities, and new digital mental health research will facilitate ongoing integration of technology at all levels of care.”

— Dror Ben-Zeev, PhD



Text: Evidence: This research study shows how FOCUS™, a virtual mental healthcare intervention, can be as or more effective than in-person care.

Funded by Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)

Dror Ben-Zeev, PhD: At some point it was the time to see how does FOCUS™, a fully remote digital mental health intervention with some human support in the loop as well, how does that compare to your standard clinic-based intervention? And, as far as we know, that was the first, fully powered, comparative effectiveness trial between smart phone intervention for serious mental illness and clinic-based care for serious mental illness.

One finding of the randomized control trial that was really quite startling was the vast majority of people assigned to FOCUS™ actually went on to commence care. Whereas, only approximately half of the people assigned to clinic-based intervention ever made it into the clinic for a single session.

The second finding was that, in terms of clinical outcomes, was, both of them did better after three months but you couldn't tell them apart. And so, that is a really important point because it speaks to the advantages of telehealth.

Text: Potential Impact from an Employer's Perspective

Tammy Fennessy, PHR, GBA: People have been touting peer to peer counseling as the “end-all-be-all.” And if a smart phone program can actually get those types of results, I think that's really impressive.

I think also what is really promising about this is if you are able to get the services on demand, when you need them. I think that enables people to understand how to manage their conditions themselves better.

Text: Potential Impact from a Mental Health Professional's Perspective

Kevin Dedner, MPH: You know I think we will look back at the pandemic and realize there were some shifts in the way that we live. And some advances in the use of technology. And, I do think that tele-therapy and telehealth is one of those areas where many of us had been slow to embrace the technology and how it can enable the increase in access. You know, help us mitigate stigma.

Text: EVIDENCE: This study shows how SHUTi™, a culturally tailored telehealth solution focused on sub-populations, dramatically outperformed a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Karinn Glover, MD, MPH: There's all this research on Black people and sleep and that in many ways our blood pressure doesn't go down, when were asleep as it does for other populations. That

is remains high as if we are poised for the next trauma.

Lynn Rosenberg, ScD: Some colleagues, who are sleep researchers, contacted me and that, um, insomnia is a problem that is more prevalent in Black women than white women.

Eric S. Zhou, PhD: Black women who participated in prior trials of a program called Sleep Health Using the Internet, or as it's abbreviated, SHUTi™...

Lynn Rosenberg, ScD: ... were less likely to engage with the program and that's what led us to try and study this issue and develop a program that program that was culturally tailored to them.

Eric S. Zhou, PhD: We found that Black women who were randomized to the culturally tailored version, were more likely to complete all six modules than the women who were in regular SHUTi™.

And this was both statically significant as well as really clinically meaningful.

The difference was more than 15% greater and when we think about a difference like that. I think about that at community-based level, we're talking about health in this country, 15% increase in engagement.

Text: Potential Impact from a Mental Health Professional's Perspective

Karinn Glover, MD, MPH: To the extent that SHUTi™, in this case, could be useful to these Black women participants for something as important as insomnia, I love that there is a solution that can help me restore my sleep. Just like Bryan Stevenson says, from the Equal Justice Initiative, “In order to fix a problem you must be proximal to it.” You have to be close to the problem.

Text: The Future of Telehealth on Mental Healthcare and Health Equity

Kevin Dedner, MPH: We're talking about generations before we have a workforce in the mental health field that looks like America. That's unfortunate. But the good news is, meanwhile, while we're working on these sort of generational issues, we can use technology to meet people where they are right now.

Karinn Glover, MD, MPH: Now where would I like to it go? I would love to make sure that, as we recreate our society, with equity in mind, safety in mind. That we would also reconsider what it means to care for each other. What it means to be culturally humble as a clinician. What it means to have health equity baked into our solutions. And to be intentional about that, so intentional that it becomes infused into everything that we do.

Strategic Implications for Employer/Plan Sponsor Mental Health Strategy



LEARN

Understand employee population risks to uncover gaps in use of mental health benefits.

- Examine claims data to identify disparities by mental health condition prevalence, quality of care, and utilization benchmarks at local, state and national levels.
- Know the social determinants of health (SDoH) of employees and their covered family members to determine barriers to mental health care.



PLAN

Build an intentional mental health benefits strategy with an equity mindset.

- Engage a diverse set of partners and key advisors, including employees, to ensure inclusive strategic planning.
- Create a whole person health equity vision and mission and integrate into the organization's broader diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy.



IMPLEMENT

Consider low- or no-cost access to digital and in-person mental health services and treatment.

- Remove or mitigate cost and access barriers to mental health services and treatment.
- Supplement employer-sponsored coverage with community efforts to address barriers to mental health care.



MEASURE

Evaluate the medical validity and return on investment offered by digital mental health solution providers.

- Validate performance claims, checking for valid methods that track and report on quality and outcomes.
- Ensure that policies and practices are aligned with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.



EVALUATE

Ensure digital mental health vendors offer specialized services to meet the needs of racially and ethnically diverse employees.

- Using what you learn about the SDoH of employees, choose a strategic partner with expertise in serving those communities.
- Ask for referrals and testimonials from diverse plan sponsors and patients.

“I would love to see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services add mental health telehealth services to the preventive care schedule as something everyone can get at no cost. The barrier to care from a cost perspective is a big one.”

—Tammy Fennessy, PHR, GBA

View the PCORI studies cited in the video:

- [Comparing a Smartphone Program with a Peer-led Program to Help People with Serious Mental Illness Manage their Symptoms](#)
- [Comparing Ways to Treat Insomnia Among Black Women](#)

Learn more:

- [The Digital Mental Health Genie is out of the Bottle](#)
- [How to Evaluate Digital Mental Health Solutions for your Employees](#)
- [Telehealth for the Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders](#)