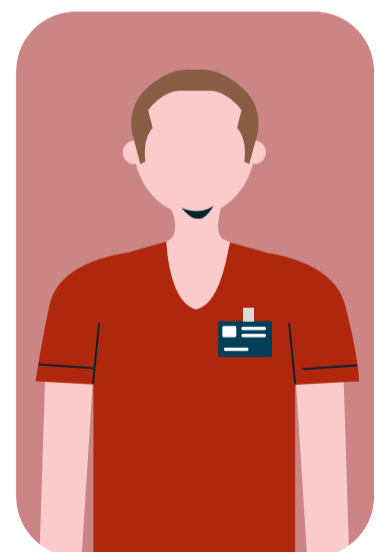
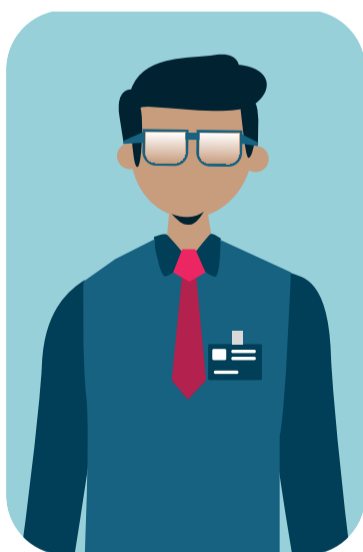




How Behavioral Health Organizations Can Decrease No-Show Rates and Improve Access to Care in 2023

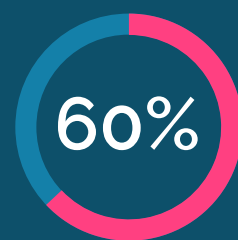


Overview

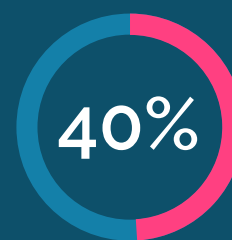
Behavioral health organizations (BHOs) are facing real challenges today. There has been an unprecedented demand for mental health services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, a stunning 90% of all Americans now believe there is a mental health crisis, according to a 2022 KFF and CNN survey.¹

The same survey also found that 51% of adults experienced a mental health emergency within their family, from self-harming behaviors to severe eating disorders. Young adults face particular challenges, with one-third of those under age 30 reporting their own mental health as "fair" or "poor."

The American Psychological Association (APA) noted in its 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey that a stunning 60% of psychologists have no available openings for new patients.² Despite the fact that 40% of psychologists maintain a waitlist, the ongoing therapist shortage coupled with the explosion in demand means that far too many are going untreated.



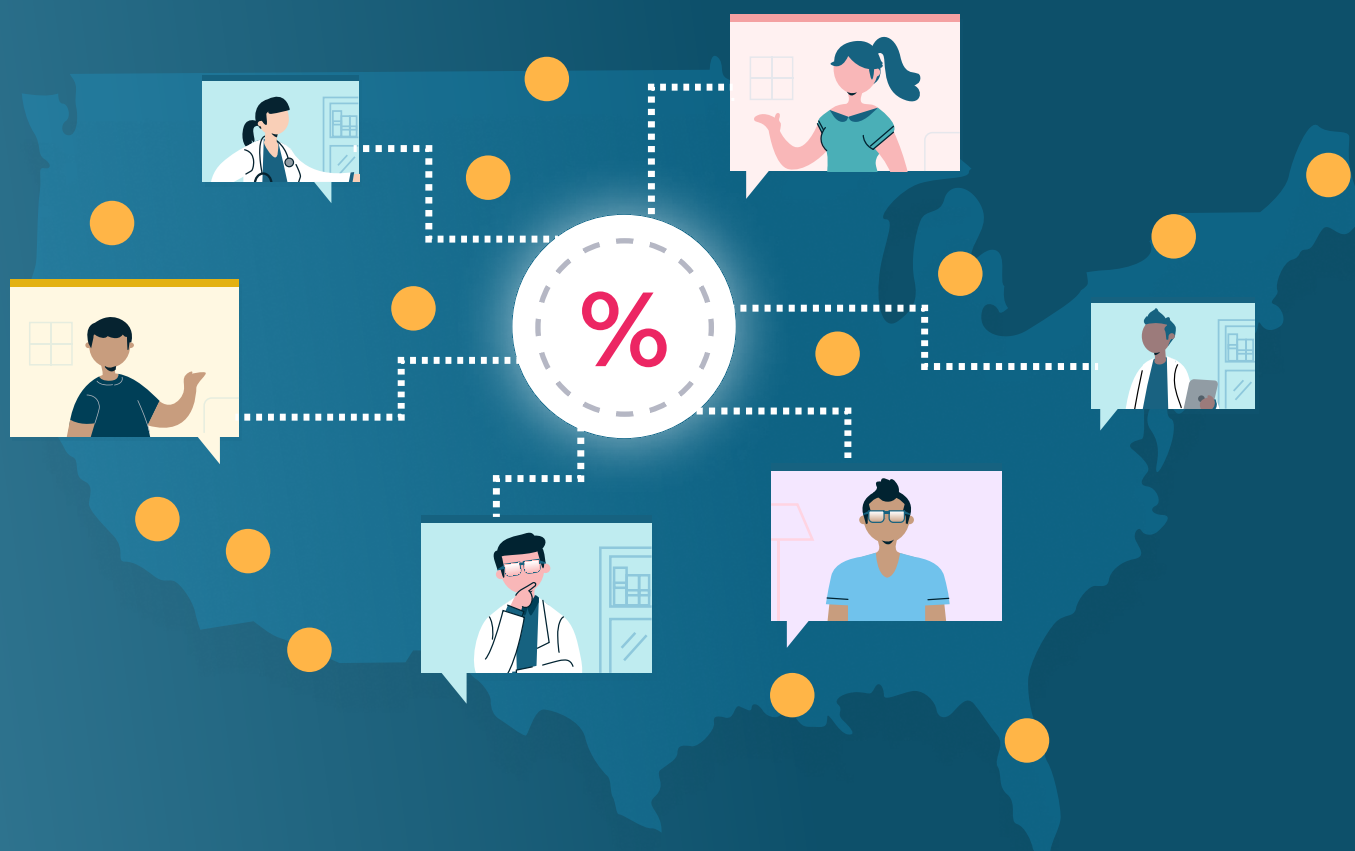
No Available Openings



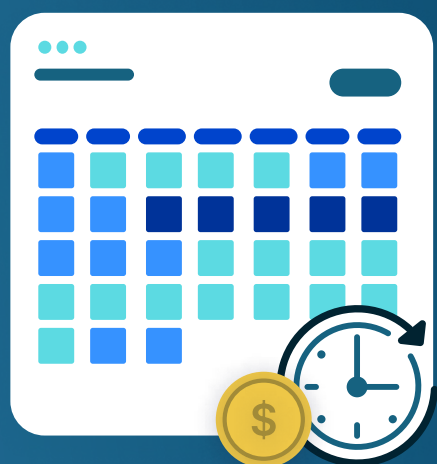
Maintain a waitlist



+ Untreated patients



Patient no-shows compound this issue. Facilities across the country are experiencing a backlog of patients who want to see a practitioner, but missed appointments leave a hole in the schedule that cannot easily be filled—or paid for.



According to 2022 research by Phippen and Phippen at the University of Louisville, some mental health facilities experience no-show rates as high as 40%.³ This leaves behavioral health organizations at financial risk because it is difficult or impossible to fill those slots on short notice.

What's more, another 2022 study titled "Study of Impact of Telehealth Use on Clinic 'No Show Rates at an Academic Practice'" found that a single psychiatric facility could lose tens of millions of dollars in revenue because of missed appointments.⁴ Furthermore, missed appointments or no-shows also impact the overall patient experience. Consider that when patients miss mental health appointments, they lose continuity of care. It can be very difficult for patients to make significant progress if they don't regularly attend appointments. This, in turn, can lower their overall satisfaction and make it even more likely for them to miss future appointments.

But why do patients miss their appointments in the first place? The reasons are as individualized as the patients themselves, but they do tend to fall into a few main categories:



Demographics

In the telehealth study cited, researchers found that males, patients younger in age, racial minorities, those of lower socioeconomic status, or less-educated were factors that increased the risk of missing an appointment.⁴

Physical Health

People with disabilities or chronic health conditions may have trouble getting to an appointment if they mainly rely on public transportation. Getting dressed and reaching their provider's office can be painful and overwhelming.

Childcare Concerns

Some parents are unable to afford childcare. Perhaps the sitter calls in sick or the child might be home from school for the day.

Work schedules

More than 23 million people in the United States work jobs that have unpredictable schedules.⁵ A patient might request the day off only to find out that morning that they have to work after all.

Transportation-related concerns

Cars break down. Traffic backs up. Buses get off schedule. Subway terminals close for renovation. All of these can make it impossible to get to an appointment, especially for patients without reliable transportation or those who must commute from rural areas.

People living with mental health conditions also face additional challenges that could increase the likelihood of a no-show. On appointment day, they may be too anxious to deal with crowds, the weather may trigger anxiety, or maybe they're having a bad day. Any one of the many steps involved in getting to an appointment, from showering and dressing to making small talk with the receptionist, could trigger overwhelming fear or a sense of being unable to cope. Neurodivergence can also exacerbate these challenges, due to "time blindness" or trouble coping with a change in their routine.

Access to Care

Another challenge for many Americans is the ability to access care at all. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than 25 million Americans living in rural areas are in designated “mental health professional shortage areas.”⁷ This means that there simply are not enough mental health professionals to serve those communities. On top of that, patients who do have access to care typically travel twice as far to see a provider as those living in urban regions.



Unfortunately, no matter what the reason might be, all no-shows have the same net effect on behavioral health organizations: No-shows vastly impact revenue, with losses of \$50 billion annually across the U.S., according to 2022 research published in the *Annals of Medicine Journal*.⁸

In that piece, researchers also noted that no-shows lead to lower productivity rates, as well as poorer health outcomes. Similarly, patients who miss appointments are also less likely to take advantage of health services overall, including preventive care that could increase the risk of premature death. This is equally true for all types of behavioral health organizations, from community mental health centers to Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to private practices. Fortunately, though, there are proven solutions.



The Solution?

A Patient Engagement and Telehealth Platform

“ Using Mend, we were able to reduce no-show rates to 6% and increase year-over-year total visits by 1000%. ”



Diego Garza, MD, MPH -
SVP Innovation and Telemedicine
Mindpath Health

Behavioral health practices have traditionally employed a range of strategies to reduce no-show rates.⁹ These solutions include:

Appointment Reminders

Traditionally, staff members made appointment reminders via phone calls. Nowadays, they are often automatically generated recordings. In either case, these reminders require the patient to answer the phone and confirm their intention to keep the appointment, which could be challenging or easy to overlook.

Motivational interviewing

This technique helps patients cultivate an internal motivation to overcome challenges and make it to their appointments. It can certainly be helpful for those who are ambivalent about treatment. However, it has little to no impact on those who very much want help but are being stopped by external barriers.

Incentivizing treatment completion

In collaboration with referral sources, this solution offers patients a reward for successfully completing treatment. Incentives can be especially useful for time-limited therapies, such as a cognitive-behavioral program for PTSD. However, this strategy is often ineffective for patients with ongoing therapeutic needs.

Contingency Management

This includes tactics like charging a no-show fee. Although fees can help offset some of the revenue loss involved with missed appointments, additional fees can also establish an adversarial relationship with the patient. Especially in a behavioral health setting, a sense of trust and a strong therapeutic relationship are paramount. The potential damage to the patient-provider relationship may outweigh the benefits of charging a fee.

Although each of these strategies have shown some success, they fail to address the full picture. No matter how nice an office might be, a patient with transportation challenges, sensory issues, or social anxiety may simply be unable to get there. A friendly reminder phone call can offer encouragement to attend the appointment, but it cannot change someone's work schedule. So, what modern strategies can BHOs employ to decrease no-show rates and improve access to care?

The answer begins with a robust patient engagement and telehealth platform that utilizes technology to address the wide range of barriers to care that many behavioral health patients face. From a streamlined digital intake process that reduces the workload for both patients and behavioral health organizations to a virtual waiting room that offers educational reading material or much-needed distractions, a sophisticated, easy-to-use platform guides patients through every step of their behavioral healthcare journey. As a result, no-show rates often plummet into the single digits.

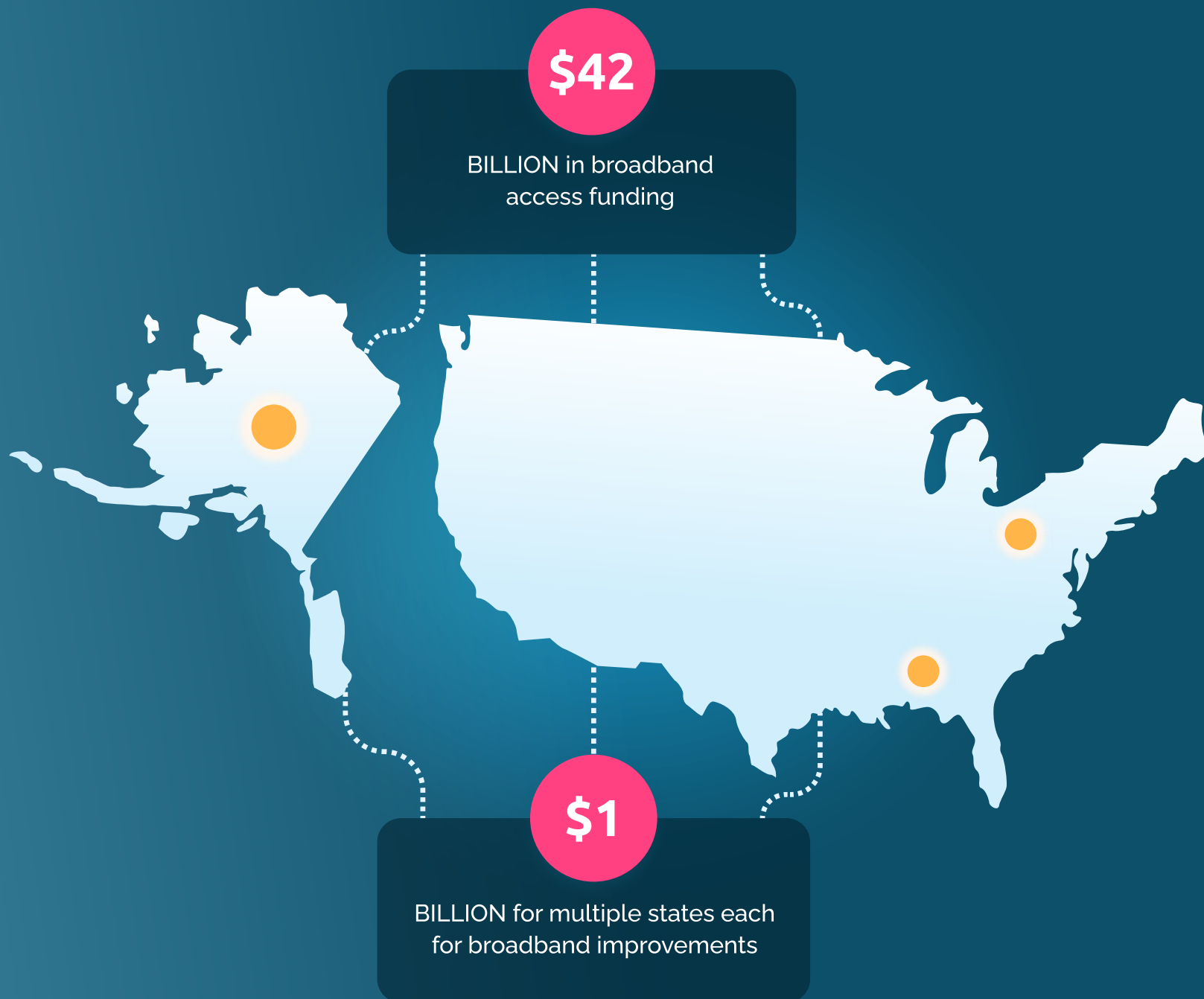


What's more, telehealth can also expand access to care. Whether patients are limited by social anxiety, executive dysfunction, or live in an underserved area, they can attend appointments from the comfort of their own homes. Although it is true that a lack of broadband access traditionally prevented those living in rural areas from utilizing telehealth services, this is rapidly changing.

“ Today, Kamala and I are making an equally historic investment to connect everyone in America - everyone in America - to high-speed internet by - and affordable, high-speed internet - by 2030. ”



President Joe Biden
June 26, 2023



As part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, the federal government committed to expanding broadband access in rural areas.¹⁰ Many providers have already jumped on board, utilizing delivery methods like fixed wireless internet to vastly improve rural broadband access.

In 2023, the White House also announced \$42 billion in broadband access funding, with rural states collecting the majority of funds.¹¹ In fact, Alaska, West Virginia, and Alabama will receive more than \$1 billion each for broadband improvements. Importantly, these funds are state-centric, which means that internet companies do not get to decide where they go, as was the case in past funding bills.

Patient Self-Scheduling (and Rescheduling)

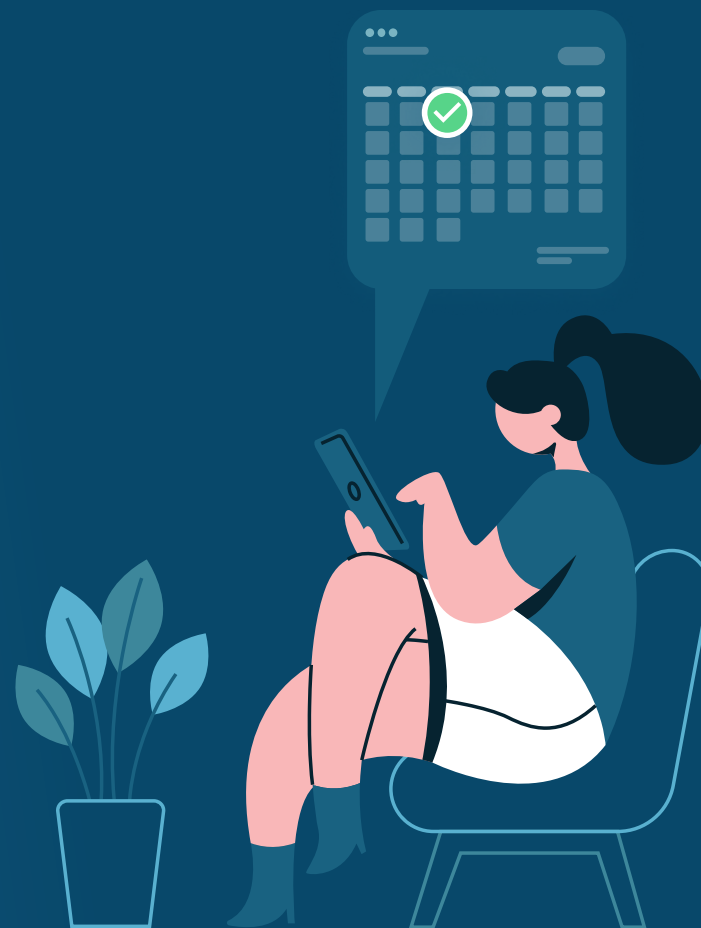
70%

**Prefer Online
Appointment
Booking**

According to 2022 data compiled by Zippia, nearly 70% of people prefer to book service appointments online rather than by phone, and a nearly equal percentage would choose a medical provider that offers online booking and rescheduling.¹² Importantly, more than half of both Millennials and Gen Z would switch providers if theirs didn't offer self-scheduling, too.

For patients with difficulty talking on the phone, whether due to social anxiety or other challenges, self-scheduling and rescheduling can be a lifeline. Patients will not have to worry about explaining themselves or their needs. If they wake up on appointment day and are simply unable to get there, they can simply click a couple of buttons rather than no-show.

A robust patient engagement and telehealth platform cannot create more appointments, but it can address every other pain point for patients seeking to schedule or reschedule appointments.



Scheduling is available 24/7

The Zippia data notes that 40% of appointments are now booked after office hours. With self-scheduling and rescheduling, patients no longer have to wait for the office to open to call and make an appointment. This inherent flexibility can reduce no-shows by allowing patients to take care of scheduling tasks when they're thinking about it and are not otherwise engaged.

Simple rescheduling

Changing an appointment time is very easy. This can be useful for patients who need to reschedule on short notice. They may hesitate to call for fear of losing their appointment only to face a long wait for the next one. However, if they can see when the next available appointment is, they can decide to reschedule with just a few clicks.

No hold times

No one enjoys being put on hold. Whether it triggers anxiety or just frustration, patients who have to sit on hold can easily become dissatisfied. With self-scheduling, they can simply open the online calendar, click on their preferred appointment time, and move on with their day.

Less anxiety-inducing

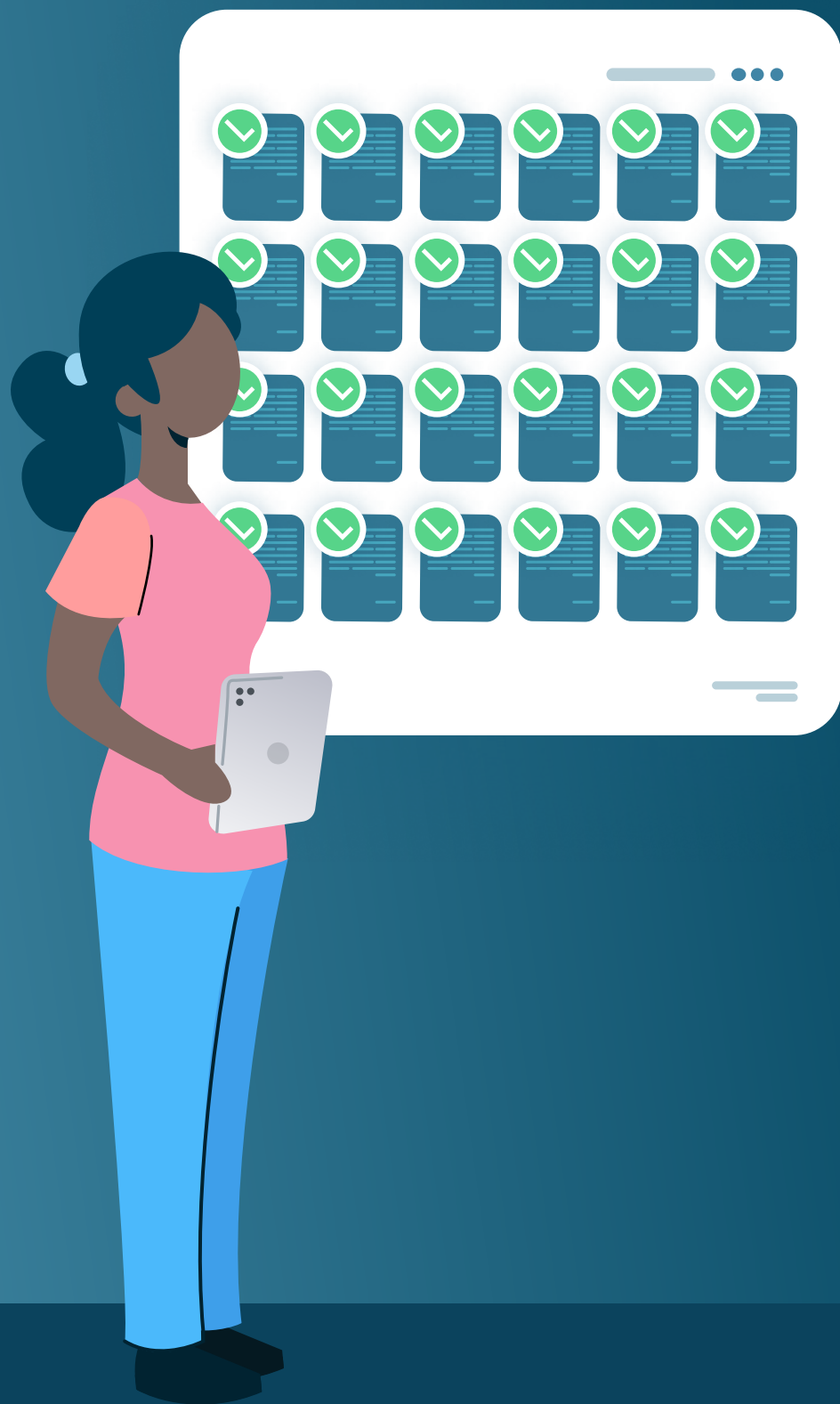
Patients with social anxiety and other communication challenges often struggle with navigating complex processes or talking on the phone. Many patients often find it significantly easier to simply look at an online calendar, choose a time, click to confirm, and move on.



Easy to see the menu of open appointment slots.

Some missed appointments are due to simple miscommunication. Perhaps the patient misunderstands the date or time that a staff member gives them. Or they might feel anxious about requesting a time that would work better. Or perhaps they simply don't realize that they're being offered the next available appointment time, but that other slots are also available. When patients can see a full calendar of available times and dates, they can cross-check against their own calendars and choose their preferred appointment slots.

Digital Intake Forms

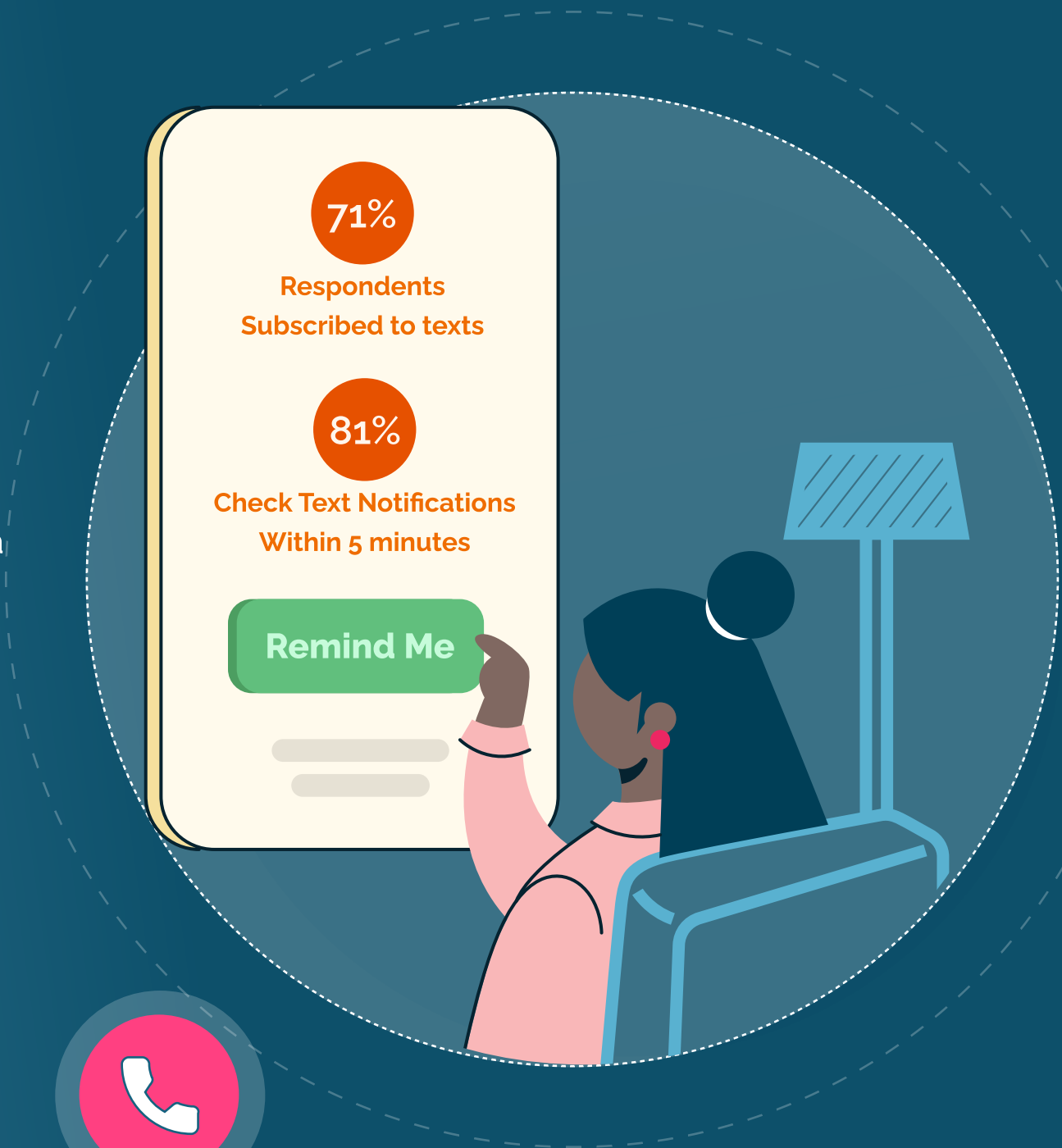


Traditional paper intake forms create a lot of busy work for patients and staff members alike. From trying to fit a complex medical history onto a couple of small blank lines to interpreting confusing instructions, patients end up wasting a lot of time and effort. Then, someone on staff must manually input the information into the organization's system, which opens up the risk of data entry errors and takes time away from other important tasks.

Digital intake forms remove the pressure. Facilities can send them to the patient out as soon as the initial appointment is booked. Patients can complete them on any device, from a laptop to a smartphone, at their convenience. They can even attach digital files, such as medication lists, rather than recreating them. The simple act of filling out digital forms in advance boosts patient engagement, making them less likely to miss their next appointment. Because these forms can be fully integrated with an organization's existing electronic health record (EHR) system, staff members no longer have to spend time manually inputting data either.

Intuitive Appointment Reminders

People lead busy lives, and it's easy to simply forget an upcoming appointment. Reminders have been a useful tool for a long time, but it is no longer necessary (or even preferable) to assign staff members to make phone calls. Modern consumers use their smartphones for nearly everything. According to a recent SimpleTexting survey, about 71% of respondents subscribed to texts from at least one business in the past year, and nearly 81% check text notifications within five minutes of receipt.¹³



Text



Email



Recorded
Voice Calls

Of course, not everyone is glued to a smartphone, so it's best to provide options. A strong patient engagement and telehealth platform allows patients to opt-in to the reminder method that works best for them whether that be via text, email, or recorded voice calls. This is especially important for those who struggle with communication, as it gives them a sense of empowerment and a useful way to handle their reminders that do not cause further issues. BHOs should send out reminders for all types of appointments, whether virtual, in-person, or even a home care visit.

2-Way Messaging



Top-tier telehealth platforms boost patient engagement with 2-way secure messaging capabilities. Providers and patients can talk directly to each other through the platform. Because the system works similarly to text messaging, there is no need to play phone tag. One party sends a message when it is convenient, and the other party responds when they have the time. Both receive notifications via email and text, making it easy to know when there is a message waiting to be read.



**Securely
Encrypted**



**Download
Feature**



**Upload
Feature**

Additionally, all messages are securely encrypted. This means that, unlike regular text messages, third parties cannot access the conversation without permission. Those messages are also available for download, which create a log for patients and providers to refer back to in the future. The best platforms allow for image and document uploading and downloading within the conversation, preventing the need to switch back and forth between multiple applications.

Reduced Wait Times and Engaging Virtual Waits

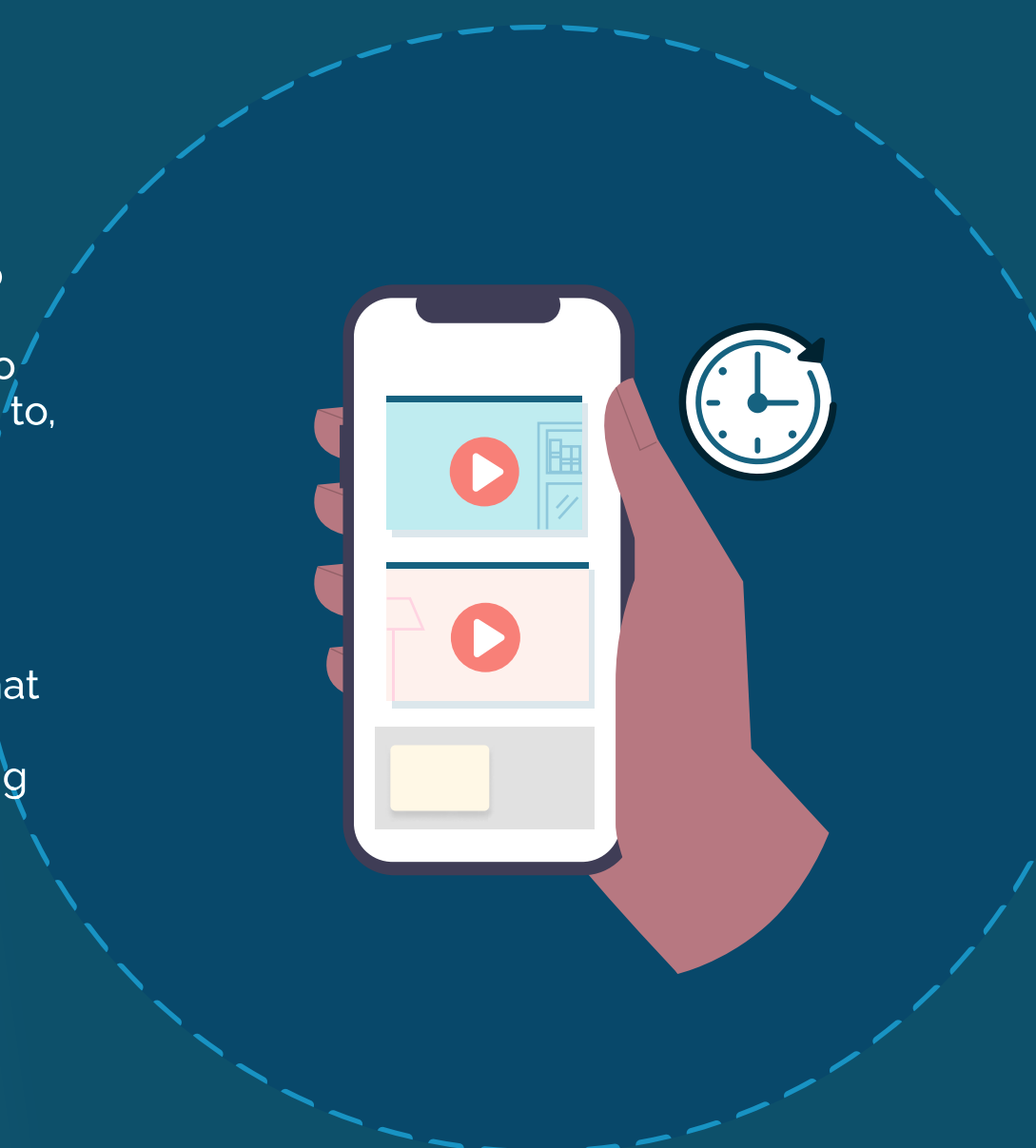
No one likes to wait. The best telehealth platforms reduce patient wait times through more efficient scheduling. Allowing patients to self-schedule and reschedule and using AI to predict no-shows helps facilities know when to double-book appointment slots and when not to, providing smoother and more efficient patient flow.

But some waiting is inevitable, and many platforms just display a blank screen when a patient is waiting for a virtual visit. Platforms that stand out from the crowd offer something for patients to do while they wait, such as watching engaging health videos. This can increase patient engagement and simultaneously improve patient satisfaction, too.

Flexible Scheduling



Many mental health challenges find it easier to cope with tasks when things are quieter overall, such as in the evening after the stress of the day is over. Parents with small children often find it hard to attend an appointment, even if it's virtual, during the day. With a strong telehealth platform, organizations can offer expanded hours without the expense of keeping the office open late. Additionally, they can also offer flexible scheduling options for providers, allowing those who don't mind working nontraditional hours to book evening or weekend appointments.



Ongoing Digital Engagement

One of the biggest advantages of a robust patient engagement and telehealth platform is the ability to engage with patients throughout the entire cycle of their healthcare journey. After each visit, BHOs can provide digital resource materials for patients to learn more about their diagnoses. Similarly, the billing department can send out digital invoices with options for easy online payment. Even better, patients can easily self-schedule their next appointment, and providers can make themselves available to answer follow-up questions through a secure messaging platform.



Taking advantage of all these continuing touchpoints will ensure patients are engaged and satisfied with their care. And patients who are engaged and satisfied are more likely to be loyal and less likely to miss future appointments.

Trying It All Together

So, how can behavioral health organizations decrease no-show rates and improve access to care in 2023? Patients miss appointments for many reasons, from transportation issues or childcare challenges to anxiety. And more than 25 million Americans currently lack access to mental healthcare because they live in rural areas.

Missed appointments can take a steep toll on both patients and facilities. Patients are less likely to receive the continuity of care they need. Organizations can lose tens of millions of dollars. Although these challenges are complex, they are not impossible to overcome and a robust telehealth and patient engagement platform can provide flexible and comprehensive solutions.

From self-scheduling and rescheduling to intuitive appointment reminders, a robust patient engagement and telehealth platform engages patients throughout the entirety of their healthcare journey. This modern-day solution provides online options for patients who dread making phone calls or filling out paperwork, and it offers flexible scheduling for those who need early morning or late evening appointments.

Best-in-class platforms can also drastically lower wait times and offer engaging education content while the patient waits for the physician to join the call. In addition, telehealth can vastly improve access to care among people living in underserved areas, as well as those who are limited by physical disabilities, anxiety, depression, or other restricting concerns. Considering the potential of a true all-in-one engagement and telehealth platform is wise for providers that are committed to improving access to care and decreasing no-show rates.



How Mend Can Help

Since its 2014 beginnings as a mobile app for rapid appointment scheduling through its launch as a full-service telehealth platform in 2016, Mend has always been ahead of the curve in providing easier access to healthcare. The company scaled rapidly in 2020, moving from one million video visit minutes per month at the beginning of that year to 1 million minutes per day by May.

As Mend continues to evolve to meet new challenges, the focus remains on breaking down barriers to healthcare, including the often complex social, communication-related, and even transportation-focused challenges that many behavioral health patients face.



Mend's highly customizable telehealth platform lowers no-show rates and boosts patient engagement at every step. Mend envisions a future in which automation doesn't replace healthcare professionals but instead enables them to focus on what they do best—taking care of patients—while the system handles the paperwork and other backend tasks. Learn more about [how Mend works](#) or [schedule a demo](#) today.

- 1** KFF. KFF/CNN Mental Health in America Survey (Oct. 2022). <https://www.kff.org/other/report/kff-cnn-mental-health-in-america-survey/>
- 2** American Psychological Association. 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2022-covid-psychologist-workload>
- 3** Phippen, Philip E. and Phippen, Philip E. (2022). "Reducing the No-show Rate at a Community Mental Health Organization". Doctor of Nursing Practice Papers. Paper 47.
- 4** Muppavarapu K, Saeed SA, Jones K, Hurd O, Haley V. Study of Impact of Telehealth Use on Clinic "No Show" Rates at an Academic Practice. *Psychiatr Q.* 2022 Jun. doi: 10.1007/s11126-022-09983-6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9004215/>
- 5** The Shift Project. Still Unstable: The Persistence of Scheduling Uncertainty During the Pandemic. https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COVIDUpdate_Brief_Final.pdf
- 6** Alawadhi A, Palin V, van Staa T. Investigating the reasons for missing an outpatient appointment in Royal Hospital, Sultanate of Oman: Perspectives of patients and medical staff in a survey. *Health Sci Rep.* 2022 Jan 11;5(1):e470. doi: 10.1002/hsr2.470. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35036575/>
- 7** National Alliance on Mental Illness. Mental Health by the Numbers. <https://nami.org/mhstats>
- 8** Adepoju OE, Chae M, Liaw W, Angelocci T, Millard P, Matuk-Villazon O. Transition to telemedicine and its impact on missed appointments in community-based clinics. *Ann Med.* 2022 Dec;54(1):98-107. doi: 10.1080/07853890.2021.2019826. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8725902/>
- 9** Molfenter, Todd. (2013). Reducing Appointment No-Shows: Going from Theory to Practice. *Substance use & misuse.* 48. 10.3109/10826084.2013.787098. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236264766_Reducing_Appointment_No-Shows_Going_from_Theory_to_Practice
- 10** Congressional Research Service. Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: Funding for USDA Rural Broadband Programs. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11918>
- 11** NPR. Rural states likely to benefit the most from funds to improve broadband access. <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/28/1184726217/rural-states-likely-to-benefit-the-most-from-funds-to-improve-broadband-access>
- 12** Zippia. 23 Appointment Scheduling Statistics [2023]: Online Booking Trends. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/appointment-scheduling-statistics/>
- 13** SimpleTexting. 45+ Texting & SMS Marketing Statistics to Know in 2023. <https://simpletexting.com/2023-texting-and-sms-marketing-statistics/>