

# Report: Telehealth to reach 1.8 million globally by 2017

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[http://www.fiercehealthit.com/story/report-telehealth-reach-18-million-globally-2017/2013-01-22?utm\\_medium=nl&utm\\_source=internal](http://www.fiercehealthit.com/story/report-telehealth-reach-18-million-globally-2017/2013-01-22?utm_medium=nl&utm_source=internal)

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An estimated 1.8 million patients will be treated through telehealth worldwide by 2017, according to a new report from market research firm InMedica.

InMedica estimated that in 2012, 308,000 patients were remotely monitored for congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, hypertension and mental health conditions. Most of those were monitored after being in the hospital--a growing trend as hospitals seek to curb readmissions. In the U.S., 140,000 post-acute-care patients and 80,000 ambulatory patients were monitored last year, according to an announcement.

The benefits of monitoring for congestive heart failure are firmly established, the report says, predicting strong growth as well for COPD. However, it predicts diabetes monitoring will overtake COPD to become the second-most-common use of telehealth by 2017. It predicts the readings from personal glucose monitors will be integrated with telehealth systems to allow providers to more closely monitor glucose levels.

InMedica sees four main drivers of telehealth demand:

- **Government mandates:** In the United States, that includes efforts to avoid reducing readmission penalties associated with Meaningful Use. Governments such as the U.K., France and China, however, also are promoting telehealth as a way to save money.
- **Providers:** Efforts to improve ties to patients and improve care often are being undertaken even without a clear return on investment.
- **Payers:** Insurers want to become more competitive and reduce in-patient payouts.
- **Patients:** There's little patient demand at this point, the report says, other than in rural areas where access to physicians and clinics is limited. The proliferation of personal devices such as those tracking personal fitness, however, is expected to boost demand for ways to track diseases.

These numbers pale compared to those from analyst firm Berg Insight, which put the number of patients worldwide who used home-based remote monitoring services in 2012 at approximately 2.8 million. It predicted that will grow 9.4 million connections worldwide by 2017.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services earlier this month allocated \$1.9 million to healthcare organizations and networks establishing telehealth programs for rural and medically underserved parts of the population. It allocated up to \$300,000 for a national center and \$325,000 for each of 12 regional centers.

Reimbursement has been in a sticking point in the adoption of telehealth. A bill introduced in the House of Representatives earlier this month could ease that by expanding reimbursement for telehealth services in federal programs. Meanwhile, insurers continue to join in. WellPoint, the second largest health insurer in the country, recently announced plans to include coverage for such telemedicine services in all of its employer and individual plans.