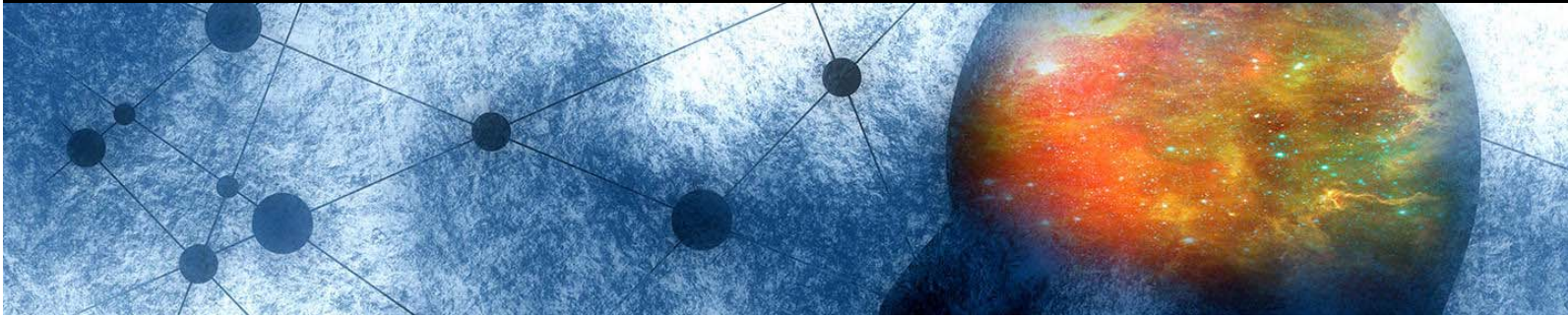


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# How Technology Improves Access to Behavioral Healthcare

A growing number of Americans require better access to behavioral health treatment options. Digital solutions can help.



by Jonathan Karl

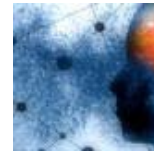
Jonathan Karl is the director of healthcare sales at CDW.

Mental illness is a growing epidemic in the U.S.

More than 43 million Americans, roughly 18 percent, have a mental health condition, according to a 2017 report published by Mental Health America. However, many of those individuals lack access to care, with one in five adults reporting an unmet need and nearly 8 percent of youth without access to mental health services through private insurance. Overall in 2017, 56 percent of American adults with a mental illness did not receive treatment, according to the report.

Exacerbating the issue is a shortage of providers to treat such patients.

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many people as providers in the highest-ranked states." For example, there is only one mental health professional for every 1,260 people in the state of Alabama.

While not a panacea, digital solutions can help to alleviate some of this pressure, particularly by improving accessibility for patients. When it comes to improving behavioral care, technology must be a key part of the solution.

[DOWNLOAD: Get CDW's white paper on next-generation patient engagement technology.](#)

## Legislation Makes Telehealth a More Realistic Option

Telehealth is one way providers are able to expand their reach and bandwidth. Currently, about 30 states allow Medicaid coverage for telemental care, [according to mHealthIntelligence](#), including Illinois, where legislation was approved last month mandating reimbursement for the use of telehealth by behavioral and mental health providers. Gov. Bruce Rauner said taking such steps will "dramatically improve" treatment for both mental health and substance abuse patients throughout the state.

Meanwhile, in Kentucky, Hazard Independent Schools is one of 70 systems in the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative [leveraging an online software tool](#) that teachers can use to deliver behavior interventions, and that students can use to access personalized guidance and emotional resources. The tool helped to reduce the number of mental health referrals to outside agencies and is having a "measurable impact" on the health and behavior of students, Vivian Carter, innovation coordinator at the school system, told *HealthTech* earlier this year.

"I see the benefits of the program when I talk to students, teachers and guidance counselors," Carter said.

## Researchers Look to Mobile and VR Technologies

Mobile apps and virtual reality also are being developed to improve and expand access to treatment options. For instance, researchers at the University of Rochester [worked to develop](#) a prototype VR app through which patients take part in a virtual psychotherapy session on their own time. Built-in algorithms deliver personalized content based on patient preferences. The researchers currently are conducting usability testing on the app, and hope that, down the road, data accrued by the app will



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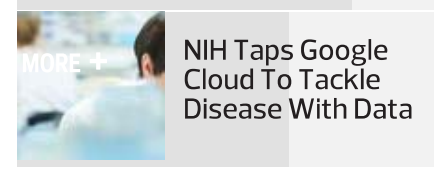
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ng to the National Institute of Mental Health, there are thousands

of mental health apps available in the iTunes and Android app stores. However, NIMH warns consumers about a lack of regulation and ineffective apps. In January, Xcertia, a nonprofit organization founded by the American Medical Association, HIMSS and DHX Group [unveiled initial mobile health app guidelines](#) to try to improve the quality of apps available.

Technology is not a cure-all for treating behavioral health, but it can make a difference, especially for patients who lack the means to obtain treatment. Let's keep the conversation going to improve accessibility.

*This article is part of HealthTech's [MonITor blog series](#). Please join the discussion on Twitter by using [#WellnessIT](#).*



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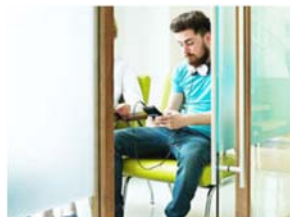
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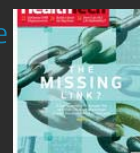
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