

A woman with short grey hair and red-rimmed glasses is sitting in a modern living room, looking at a laptop. The laptop screen shows a healthcare professional in blue scrubs. The background shows a kitchen with dark wood cabinets and a built-in oven. A glass of water sits on a small white table next to the laptop.

A NEW LOOK AT TELEHEALTH

April 2024

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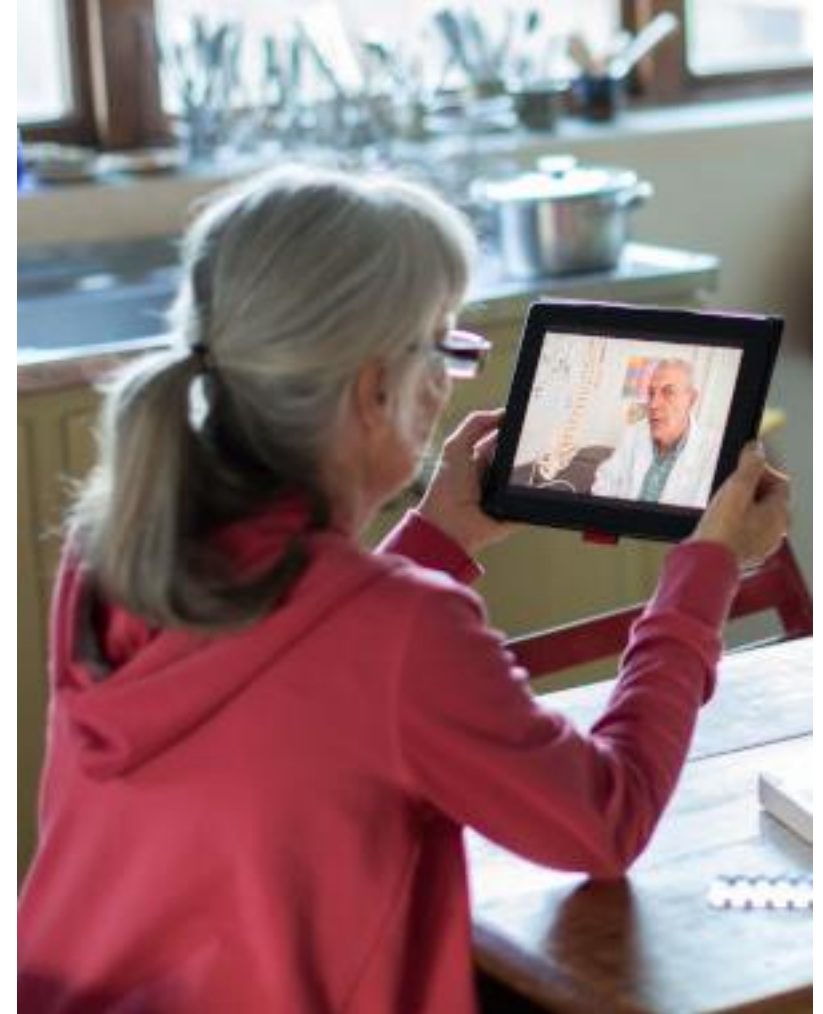


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In the space of four short years, telehealth has become an integral part of the health care sector. Previous [research by AARP](#) looked at the rise in interest in and use of telehealth before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2020, we found that awareness of the term telehealth rose by 11 points in the 4-month period between March and June (which is not surprising since this was the beginning point of the pandemic with [restaurants, retail stores, and other businesses](#) closing their doors and many [individuals masking up and social distancing](#)). At this point, about half of adults ages 18 and older cited barriers such as not knowing how to use telehealth or concerns about the possibility of medical errors or of health information remaining confidential as impeding their use.

By 2022, however, we noted that “[telehealth is here to stay](#)” as about half of adults ages 50 and older reported having used telehealth services in the previous two years (during the pandemic) and, of them, six in ten cited no barriers to use. Now, two years later, we wondered if this uptick in interest in telehealth has continued and if the experiences of telehealth users have changed. We asked U.S. adults ages 50 and older about the availability of telehealth services from their medical providers, their use of and experiences with telehealth, and their reasons for preferring telehealth visits over in-person visits or vice versa. We also asked those without access to telehealth services their likelihood of using video or audio-only telehealth options in the future if they were to become available.



Executive summary

Comfort with using telehealth services is high among adults ages 50 and older, with seven in ten (70%) saying they would be (or are) comfortable with these services.

Telehealth is seen as better than in-person medical visits when it comes to convenience for most adults (60%), but half as many (29%) say the same thing about personal safety. Getting answers to simple questions (66%) or getting prescription refills (63%) are the top reasons for opting for a telehealth visit versus an in-person one. Notably, one in eleven (9%) adults ages 50 and older say they would never opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person one.

In-person visits are seen as better than telehealth when it comes to “providing a personal touch” (73%), diagnosis accuracy (72%), or thoroughness (68%), while they are considered “as about the same” when keeping personal information safe (60%) and private (52%).

Telehealth use is high, and so too is satisfaction. Three-quarters (73%) of adults ages 50 and older have used telehealth at least once in the past 12 months and, among them, nearly all (90%) said they were very or somewhat satisfied with the experience.

Adults ages 50 and older prefer having options for receipt of telehealth services, with nearly half expressing a strong preference for receiving telehealth services through both video and telephone options (47%). One-quarter (24%) say they are unsure, suggesting a continuing lack of awareness of how telehealth services are delivered. However, adults ages 50 and older who do not currently have access to telehealth services are more likely to say they would use audio only rather than video (66% vs. 48% very or somewhat likely).

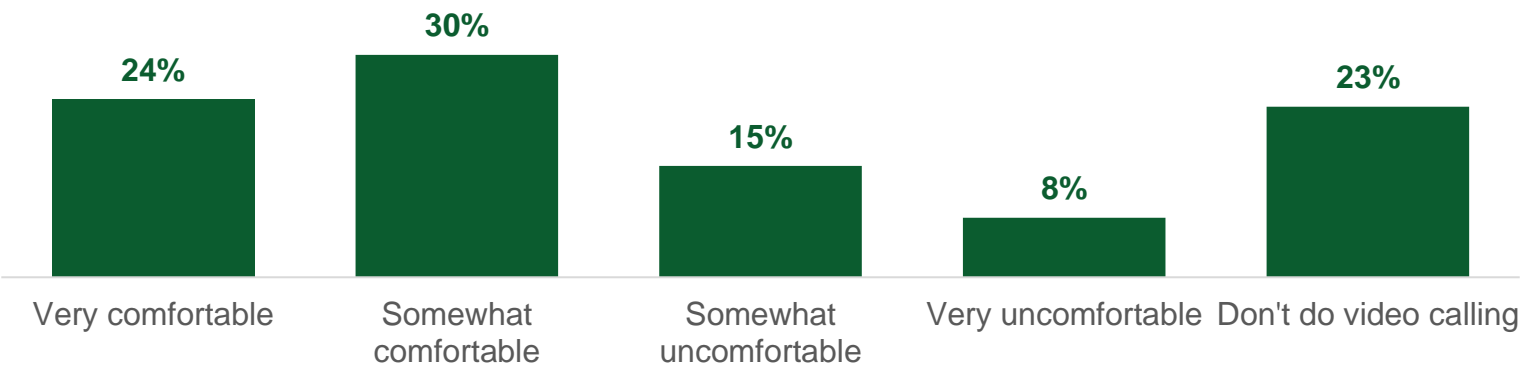


DETAILED FINDINGS

Comfort with using video calling is high among adults ages 50 and older, but nearly one-quarter report not using it on their devices.

Adults ages 50-64 are more likely than those 65 and older to report being very or somewhat comfortable participating in video calls (60% vs. 47%). Those ages 65 and older are more likely to say that they don't do video calling on their devices (26% vs. 20%).

Comfort in using video calls on personal devices
Among all respondents



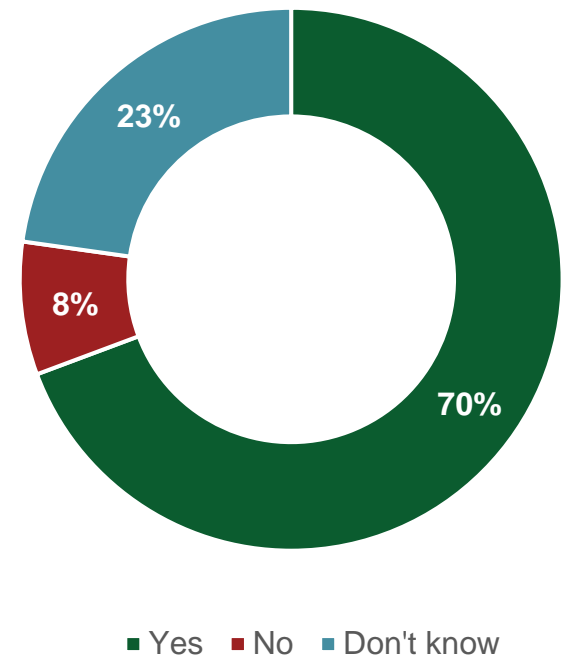
Tele1. How comfortable are you participating in video calls on your device(s)? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)



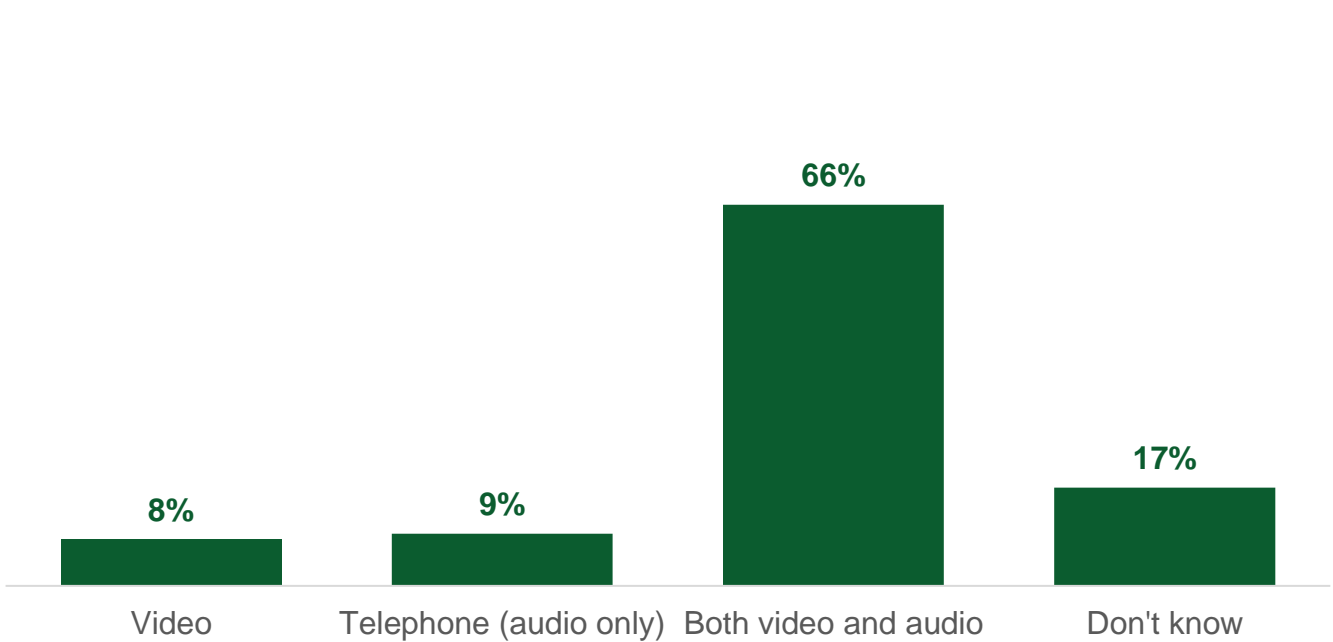
Most adults ages 50 and older say that telehealth services are available from their medical providers, with two-thirds of those noting both video and audio options.

Adults ages 50-64 are more likely than their older counterparts to say they have telehealth services available from their medical providers (73% vs. 66%) while those ages 65 and older are more to say they do not know (27% vs. 19%).

Telehealth services available from medical providers
Among all respondents



Format in which telehealth services are available
Among respondents who have access to telehealth services

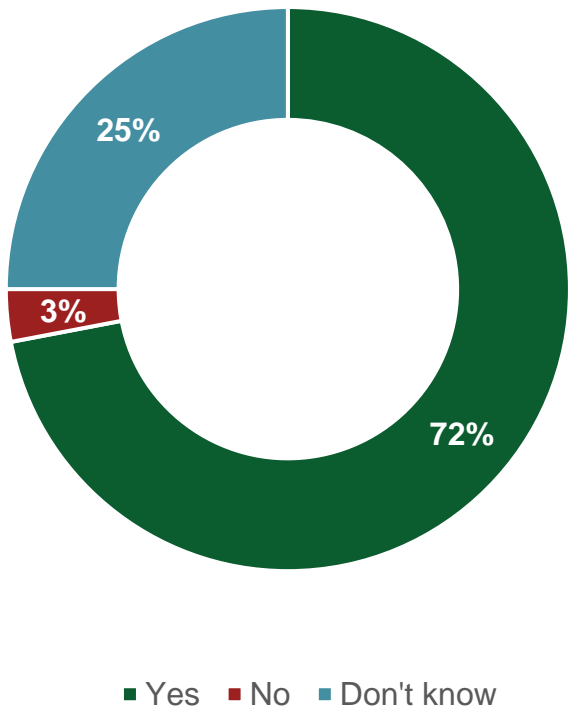


Tele2. Are telehealth services available from any of your medical providers? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Tele3. Are these telehealth services available from these medical providers by video or by telephone or both? Base: Telehealth services available (n=1,326)

Nearly three-quarters of those with telehealth services available through their medical providers report that their current health insurance plan pays for these services, but one-quarter are not sure.

Insurance plan pays for telehealth services
Among respondents who have access to telehealth services

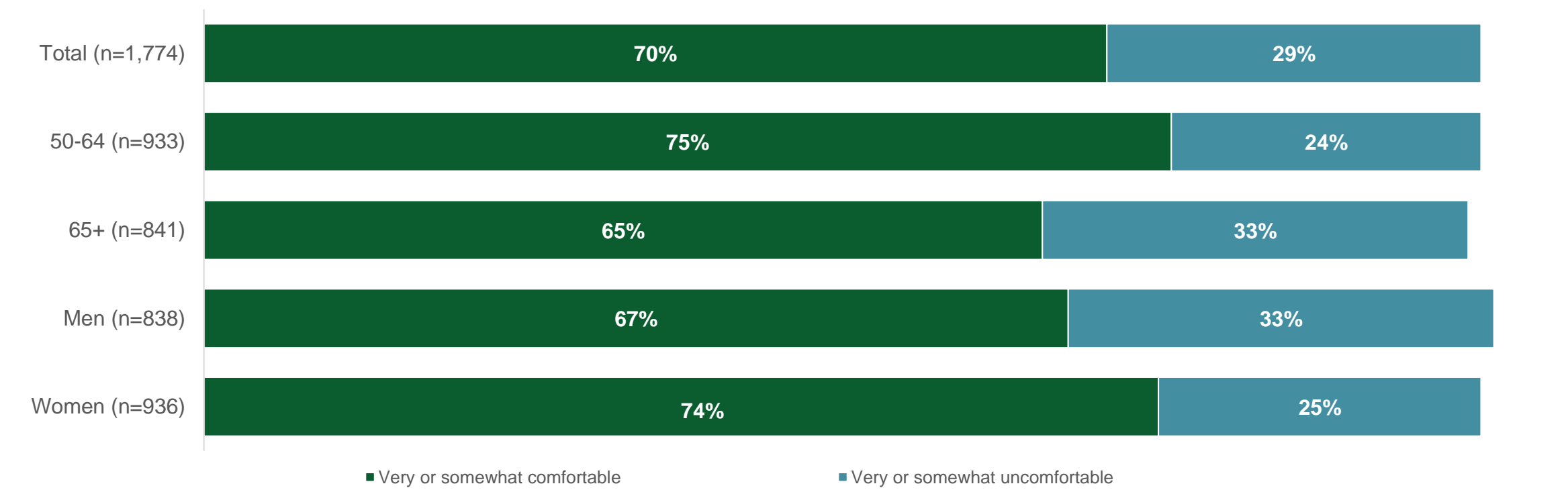


Tele4. Does your current insurance plan pay for telehealth services? Base: Telehealth services available (n=1,326)

The majority of adults ages 50 and older say they are (or would be) comfortable using telehealth services.

Adults ages 50-64 and women are more likely than their counterparts to say they are (or would be) comfortable using telehealth services.

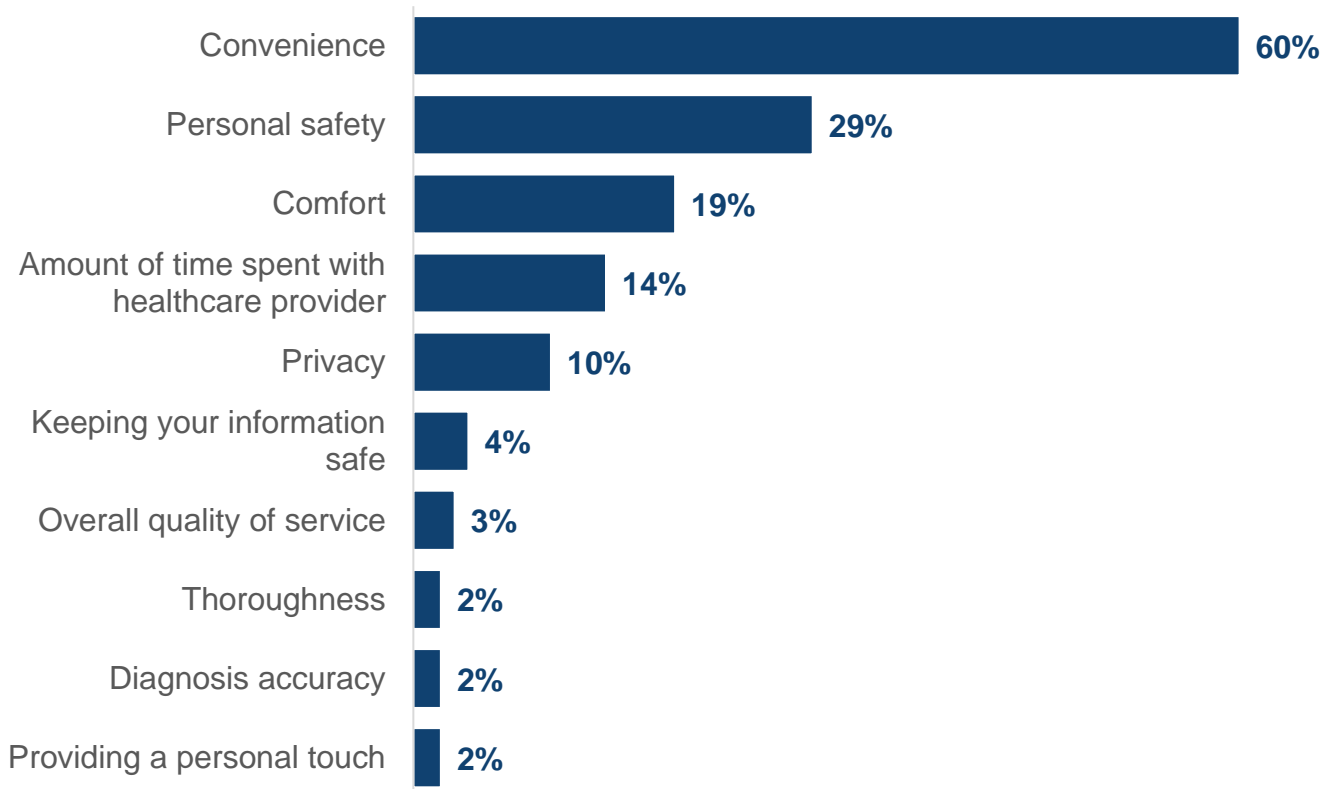
Comfort in using telehealth services
Among all respondents and by age group and gender



Tele11. How comfortable are you or would you be using telehealth services? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Most adults ages 50 and older consider telehealth as better than in-person medical visits when it comes to convenience.

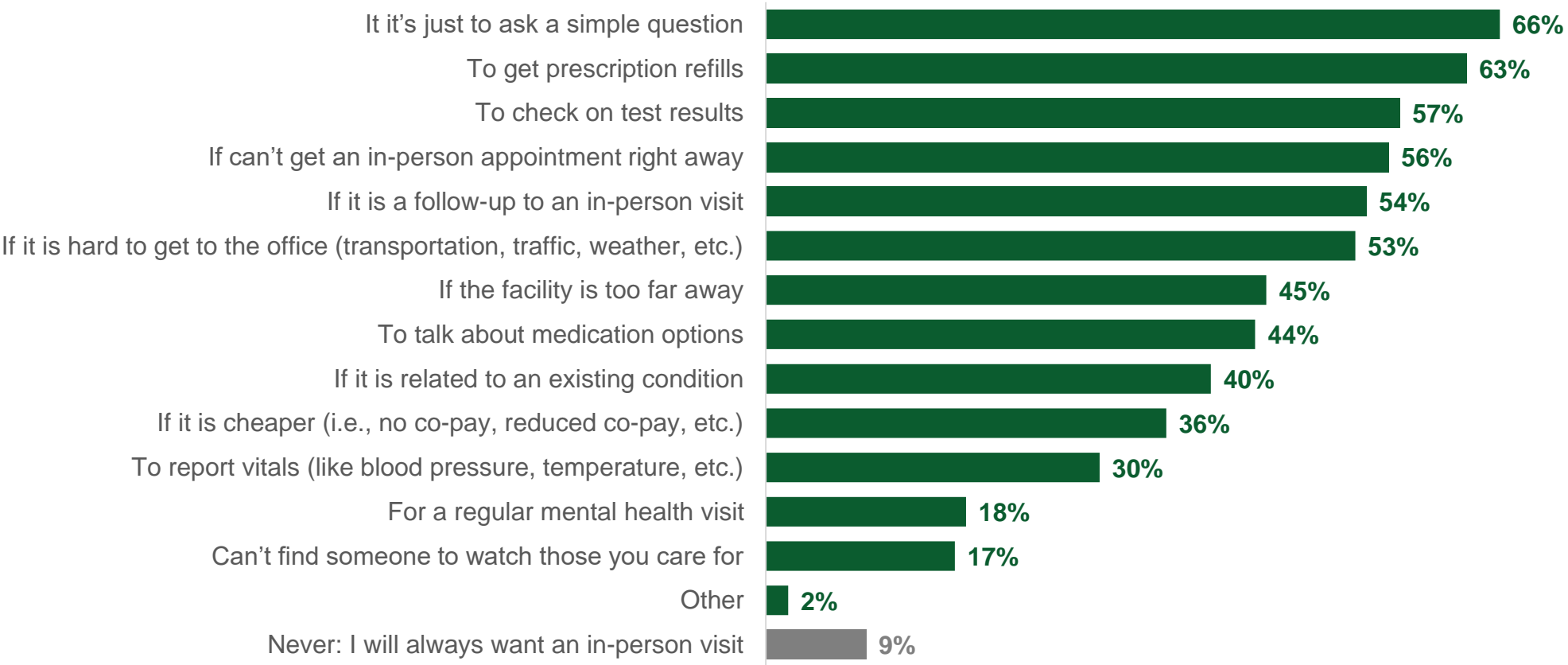
Comparison of telehealth vs. in-person visits on several dimensions:
Percentage who say telehealth visits are better



Tele13. Comparing [SHOW IF RND_01=0: a telehealth visit to an in-person visit] [SHOW IF RND_01=1: an in-person visit to a telehealth visit] to what extent would you say either is better or the same on the following measures? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Getting answers to simple questions or getting prescription refills are the top reasons for opting for a telehealth visit versus an in-person one.

Reasons to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit
Among all respondents

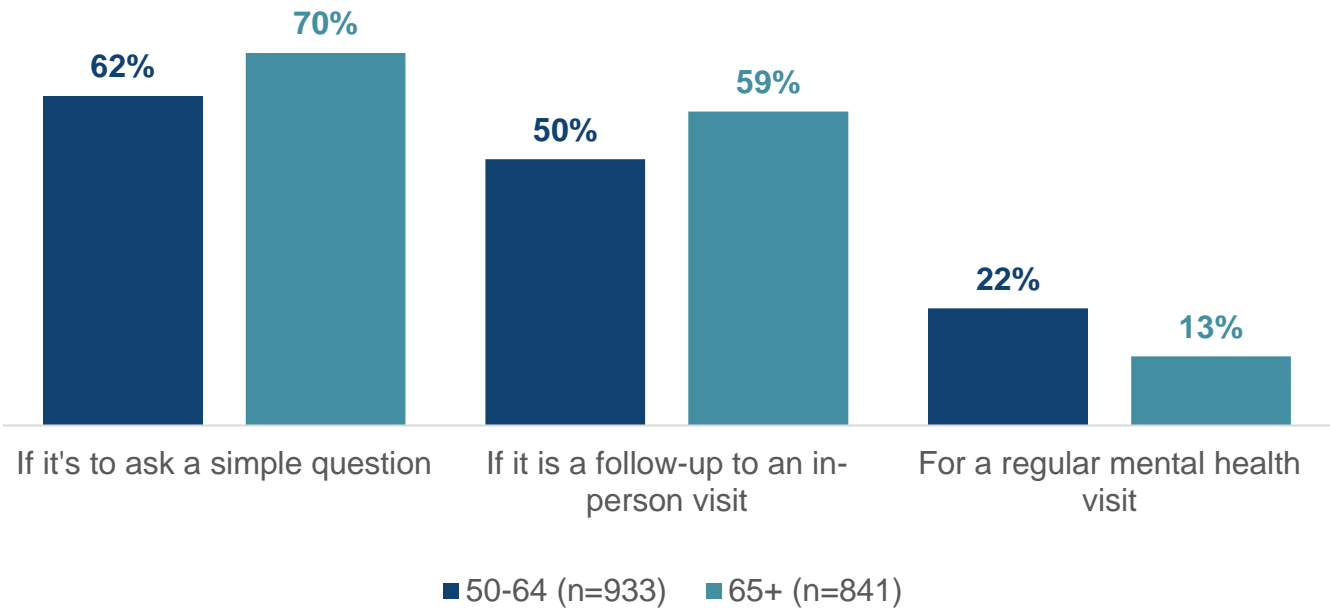


Tele14. When would you be most likely to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit with your primary healthcare provider(s)? Select all that apply. Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Adults ages 65 and older are more likely to opt for telehealth when asking a simple question or when following-up on an in-person visit.

Those ages 50-64 are more likely to opt for telehealth when scheduling a regular mental health visit.

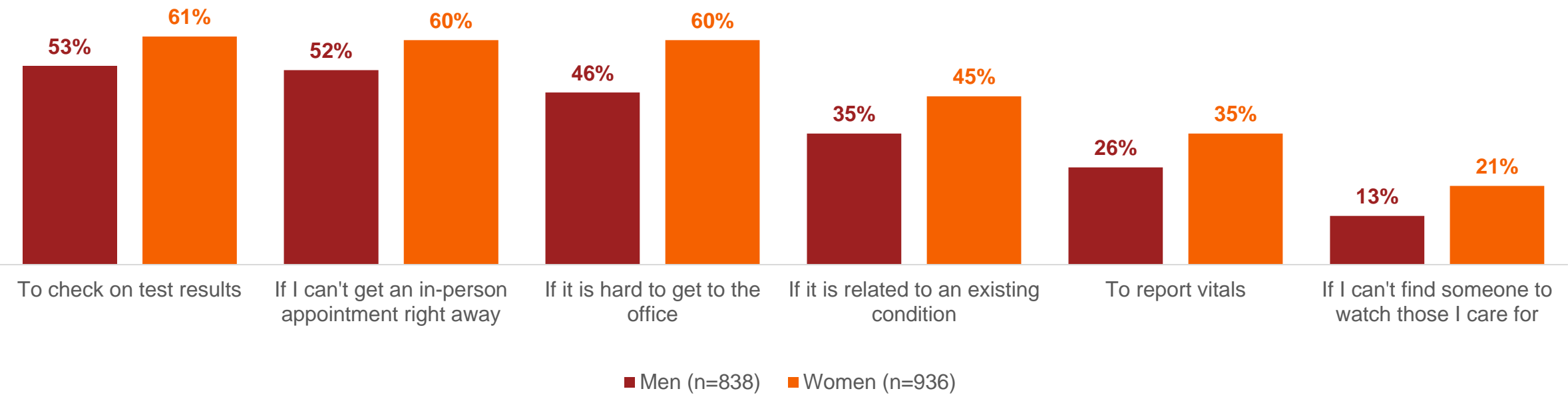
Statistically significant differences in reasons to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit
By age



Tele14. When would you be most likely to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit with your primary healthcare provider(s)? Select all that apply. Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Women are more likely than men to opt for a telehealth visit for “simple” things and when they face challenges in scheduling or getting to in-person visits.

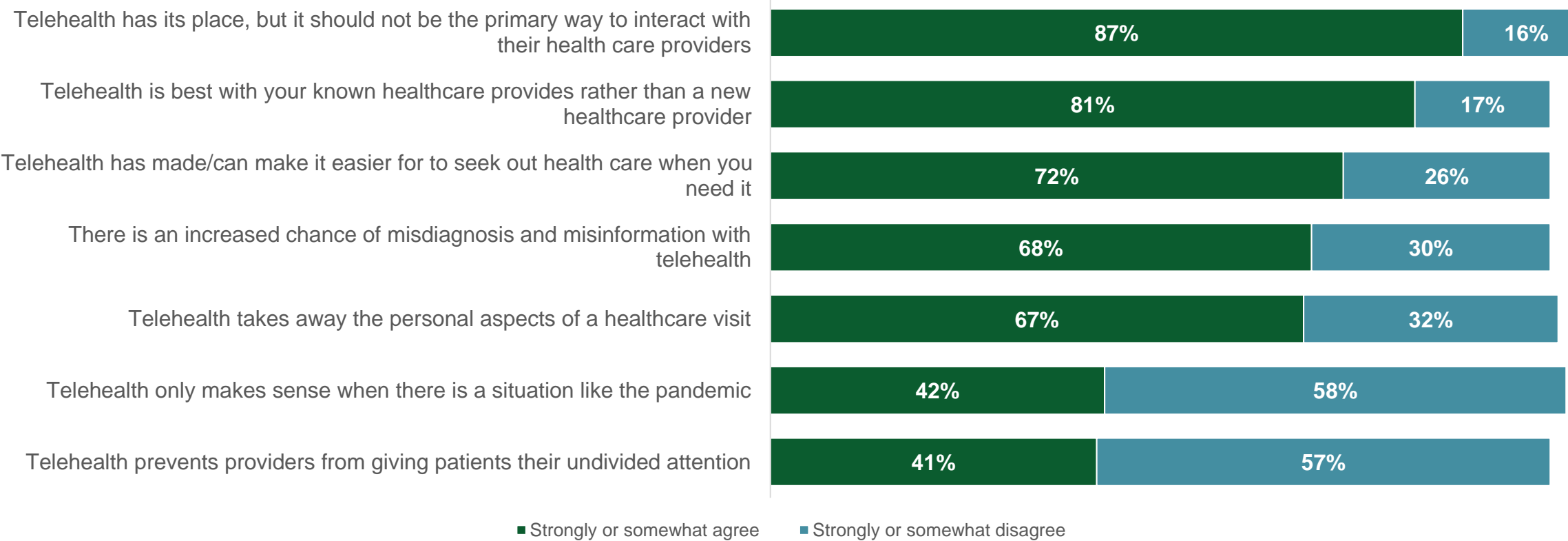
Statistically significant differences in reasons to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit
By gender



Tele14. When would you be most likely to opt for a telehealth visit over an in-person visit with your primary healthcare provider(s)? Select all that apply. Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Adults ages 50 and older agree that telehealth has its place, is best with a known provider, and has made it easier to seek out health care.

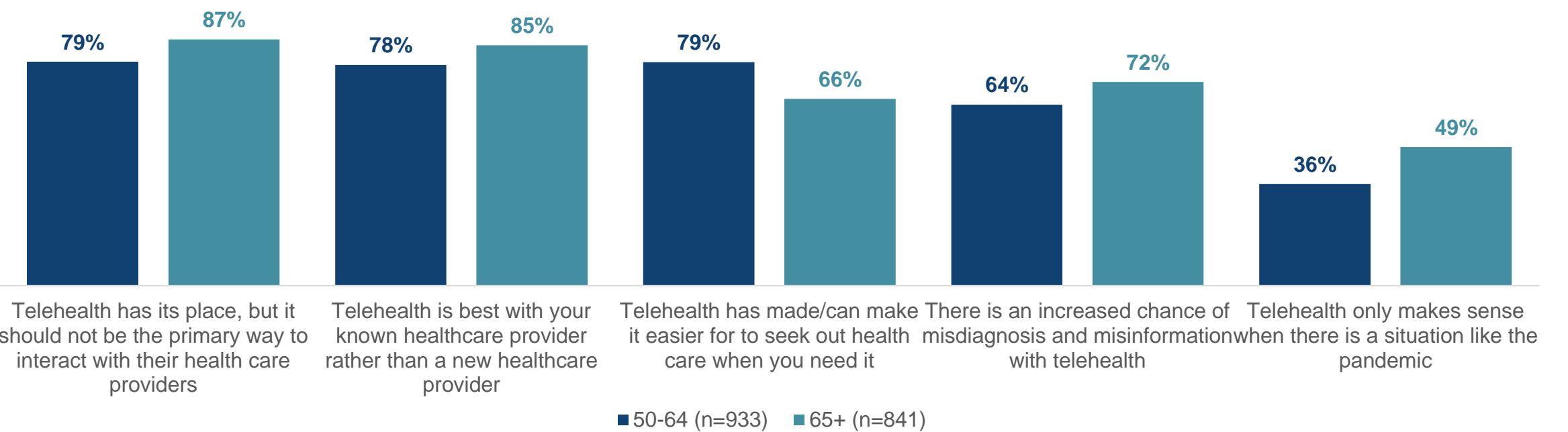
Views on statements about telehealth
Among all respondents



Tele15. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Older adults are more likely to agree that telehealth “has its place” and is best with a known provider, but there is an increased chance of misdiagnosis and is best in a situation such as the pandemic; those 50-64 are more likely to agree that it makes healthcare easier to access.

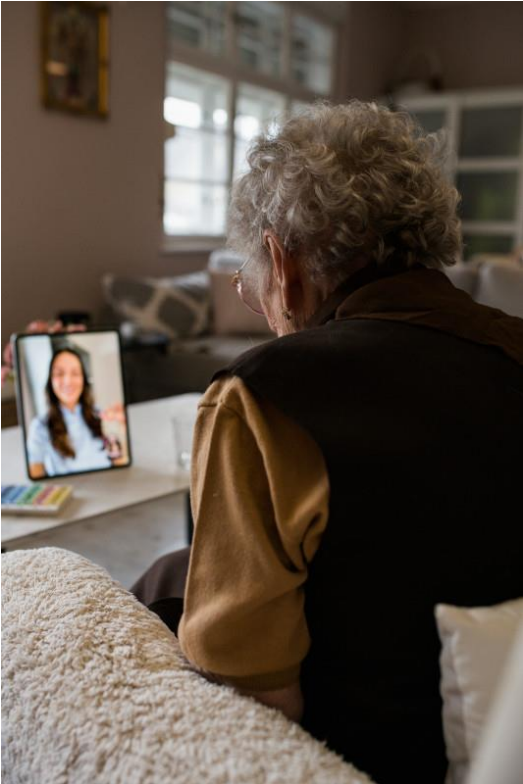
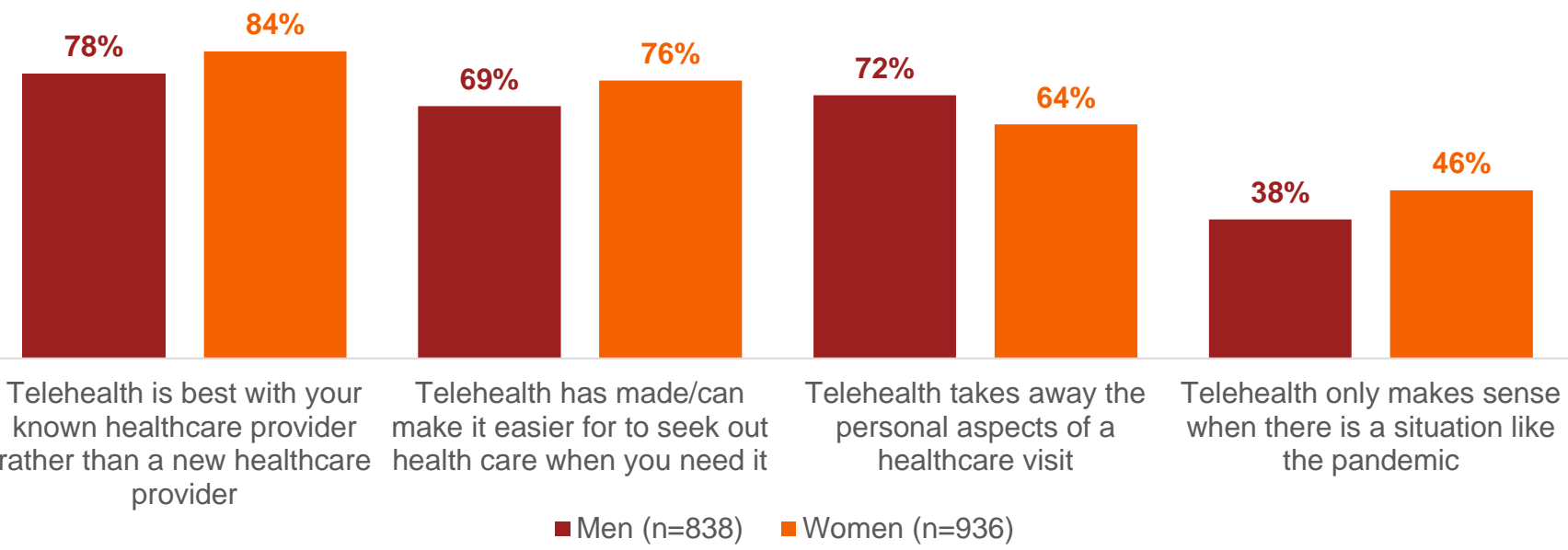
Statistically significant differences in agreement with telehealth statements
By age



Tele15. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

Women are more likely to agree that telehealth is best with a known provider, makes it easier to seek out health care when needed, and only makes sense in a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic; men are more likely to agree that it takes away the personal aspects.

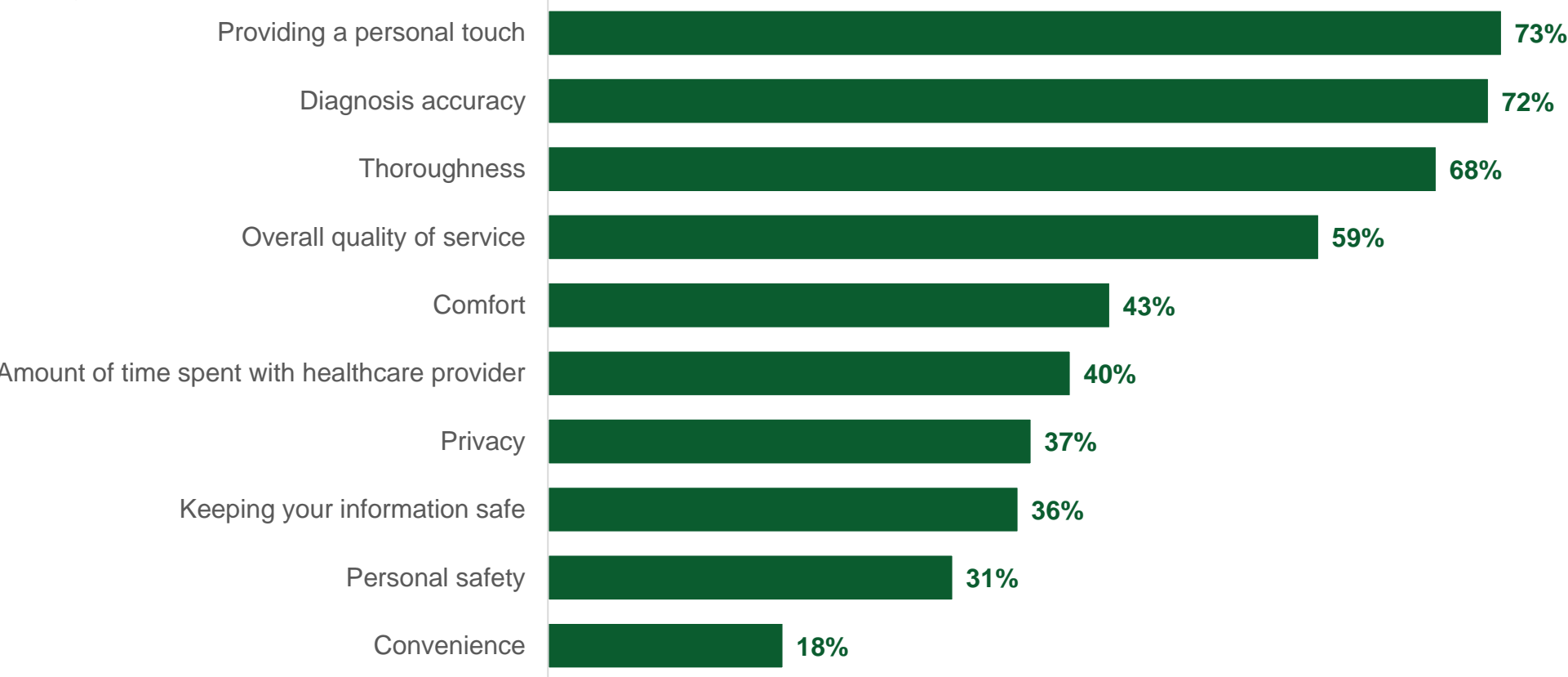
Statistically significant differences in agreement with telehealth statements
By gender



Tele15. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

When it comes to a “personal touch”, diagnosis accuracy, or thoroughness, in-person visits are seen as better among adults ages 50 and older.

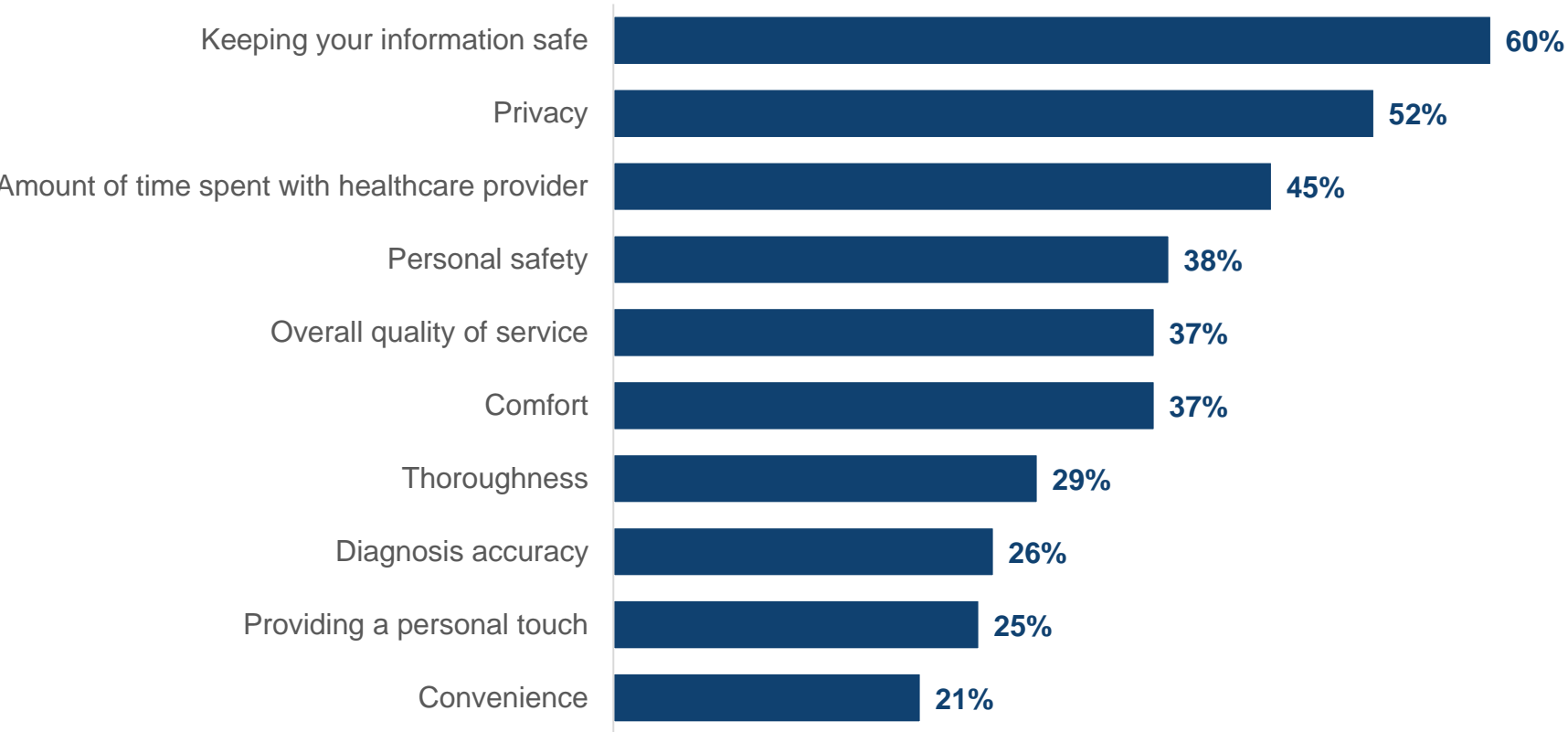
Comparison of telehealth vs. in-person visits on several dimensions: Percentage who say in-person visits are better
Among all respondents



Tele13. Comparing [SHOW IF RND_01=0: a telehealth visit to an in-person visit] [SHOW IF RND_01=1: an in-person visit to a telehealth visit] to what extent would you say either is better or the same on the following measures? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

More than half of adults ages 50 and older say in-person and telehealth visits are about the same when it comes to keeping their information safe and private.

Comparison of telehealth vs. in-person visits on several dimensions: Percentage who say they are about the same
Among all respondents

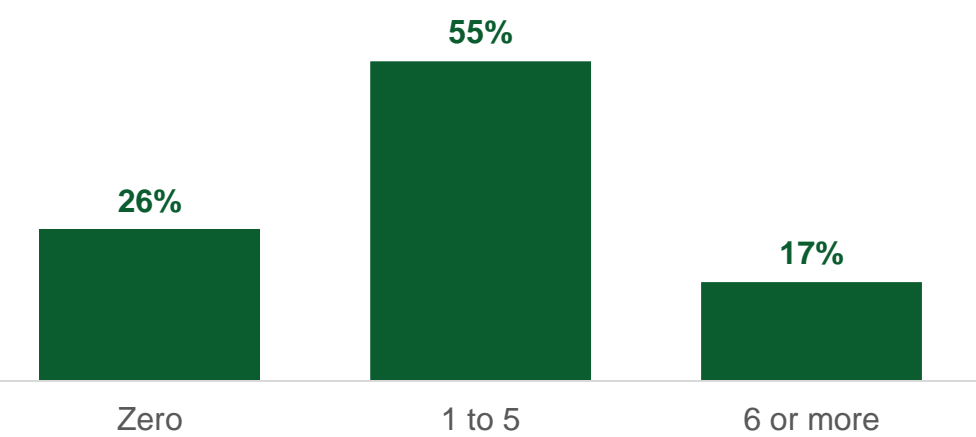


Tele13. Comparing [SHOW IF RND_01=0: a telehealth visit to an in-person visit] [SHOW IF RND_01=1: an in-person visit to a telehealth visit] to what extent would you say either is better or the same on the following measures? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

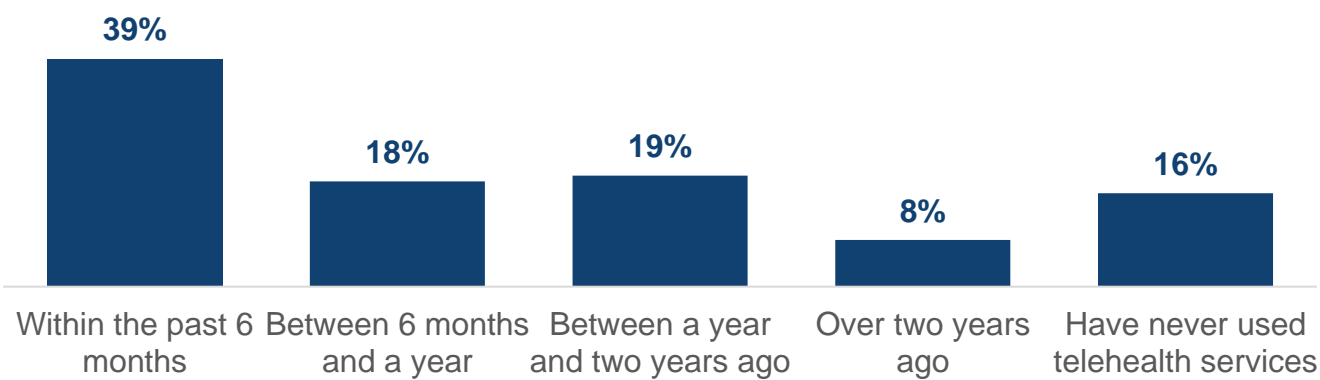
Among those with telehealth services available, more than seven in ten have sought health care services in the past 12 months.

Among those who have telehealth available and who have sought health care in the past 12 months, nearly six in ten (57%) have sought care through telehealth in the past year. One in six (16%) report that they have never used telehealth services.

Number of times healthcare services have been used in the past 12 months
Among those with telehealth services available



Recency of use of telehealth services
Among those with telehealth services available and who have used healthcare in the past 12 months

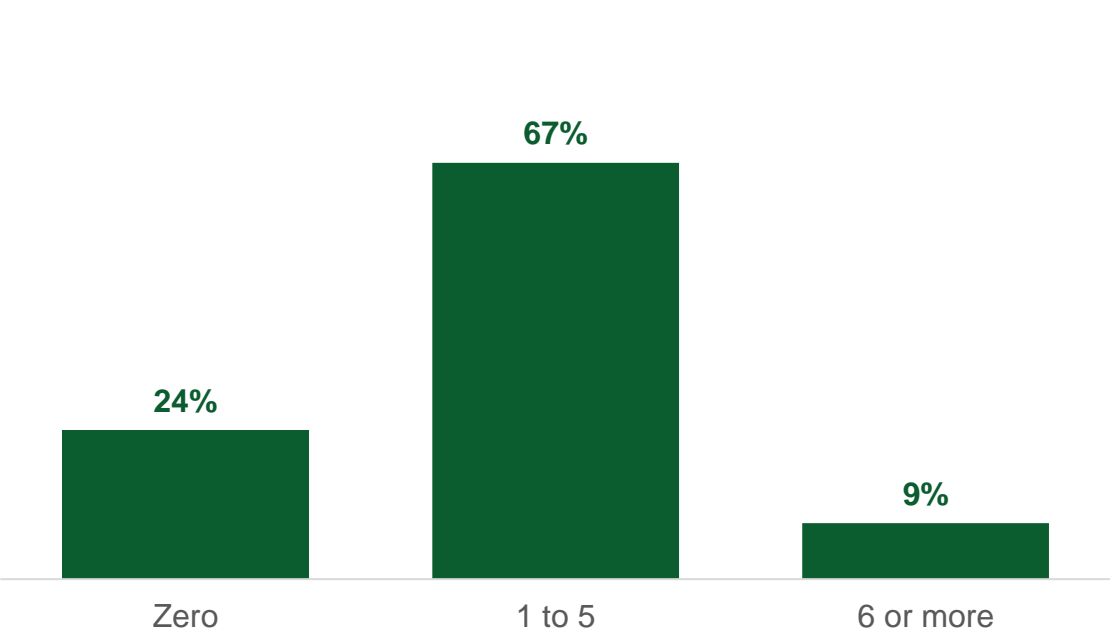


Tele5. About how many times have you used healthcare services (physical or mental) either in-person or telehealth in the past 12 months? Base: Telehealth services available (n=1,326)
Tele6. When was the last time you used telehealth services? Base: Has telehealth and used healthcare services in the past 12 months (n=1,004)

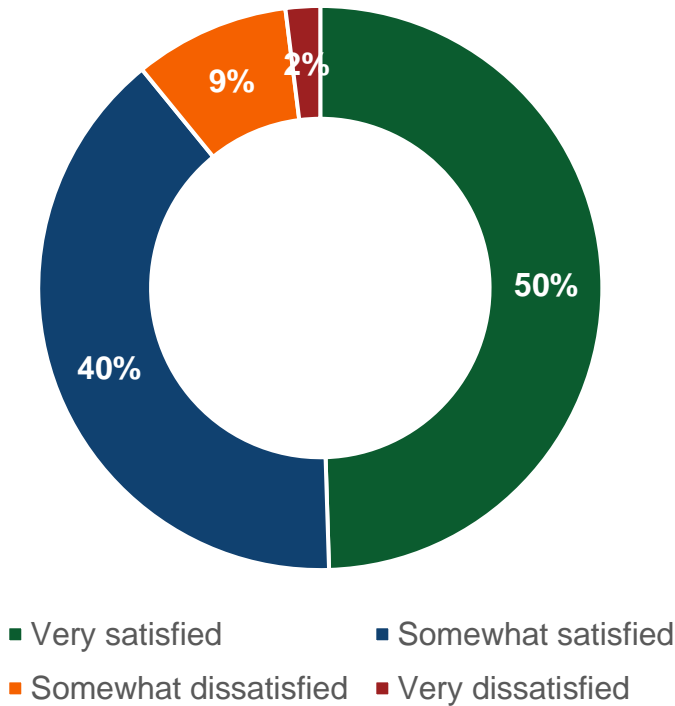
Three-quarters of adults ages 50 and older have used telehealth at least once in the past 12 months, and nearly all were satisfied with it.

Adults ages 50-64 are twice as likely to say they have used telehealth services six or more times in the past year (12% vs. 6%). While there are no gender differences in use, women are more likely to express satisfaction (94% vs. 84%).

Number of times telehealth services have been used in the past 12 months
Among those who have used telehealth in past 12 months



Satisfaction with telehealth services
Among those who have used telehealth in past 12 months

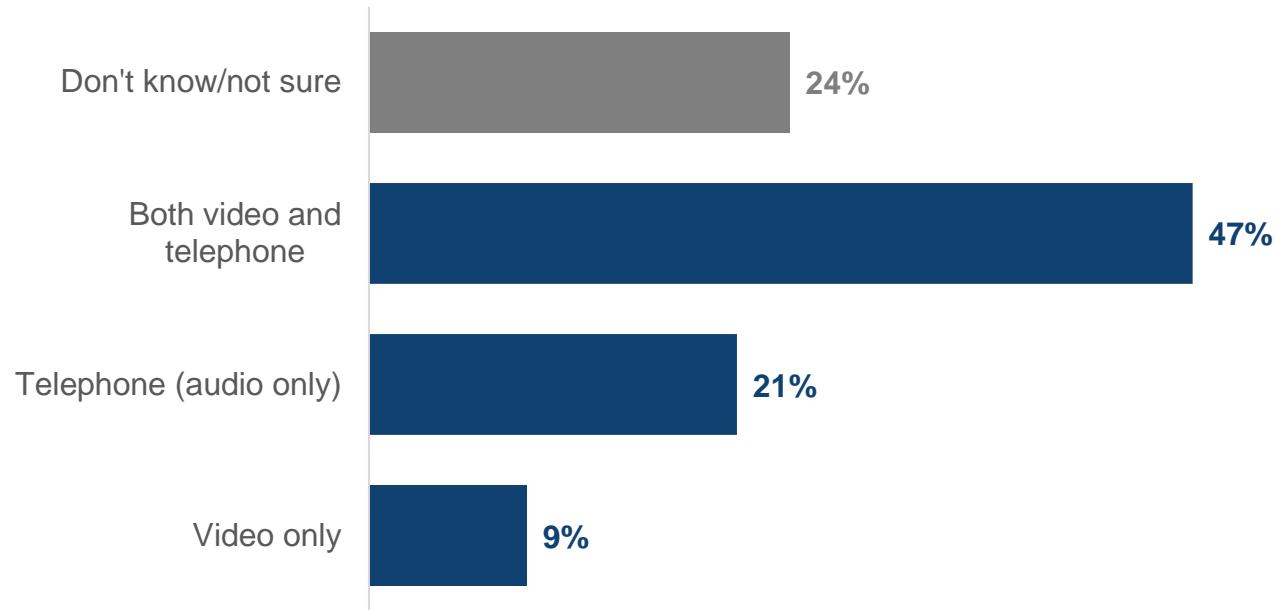


Tele7. How often have you used telehealth services in the past year? Base: Have used telehealth in the past 12 months (n=856)
Tele8. How satisfied are you with the care you receive via telehealth? Base: Have used telehealth in the past 12 months (n=856)

Adults ages 50 and older have a strong preference for receiving telehealth services through both video and telephone options, yet some are unsure.

Adults ages 50-64 are more likely to prefer video only (11% vs. 7%) while those ages 65 and older prefer telephone/audio (25% vs. 17%). Similarly, men are more likely to prefer video (11% vs. 7%) while women prefer telephone/audio (25% vs. 16%).

Preference for future type of telehealth services
Among all respondents

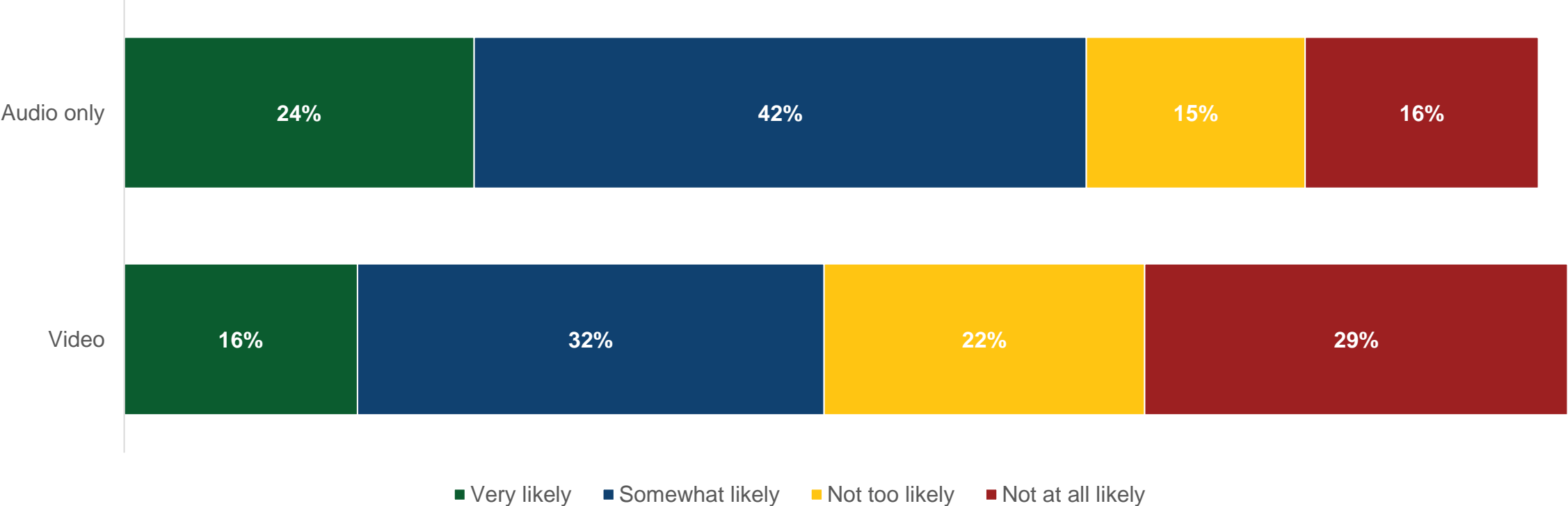


Tele10a. Which of the following types of telehealth would you prefer to receive medical services in the future? Base: Total respondents (n=1,774)

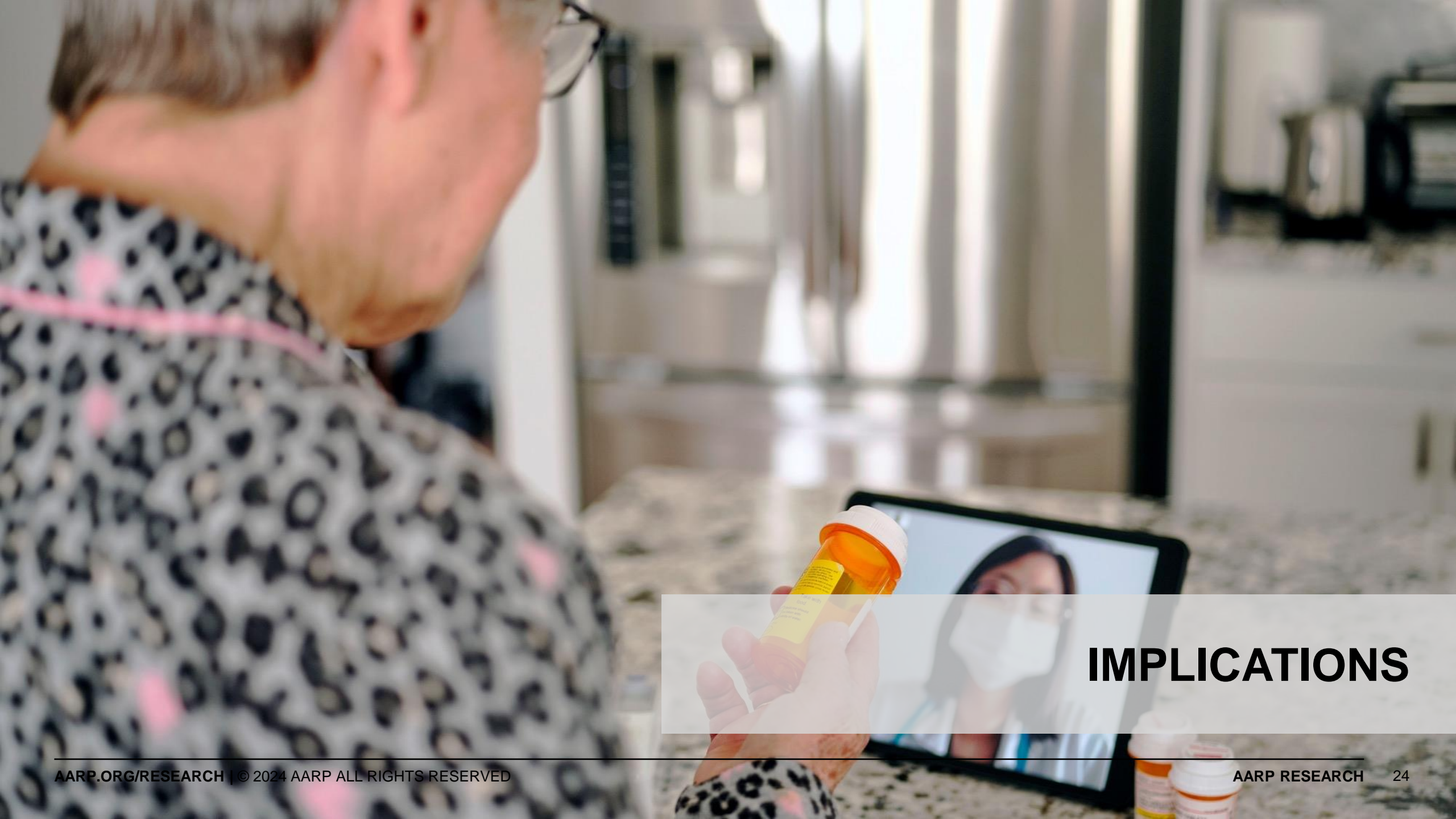
Adults ages 50 and older who do not currently have access to telehealth services are more likely to say they would use audio only rather than video.

Women are more likely than men to say they would use audio only telehealth services in the future (71% vs. 61%).

Likelihood of using types of telehealth in the future if they were available
Among those for whom telehealth services are not available



Tele10b. How likely would you use the following types of telehealth to receive medical services in the future if they were available? Base: Telehealth not currently available (n=445)



IMPLICATIONS

Implications



The story of telehealth is a story of technological innovation and adoption, albeit one disrupted by an unprecedented pandemic and its effects on daily life. In the [normal course of innovation](#), some people are more likely to adopt a new idea, product, or behavior with others opting for a “wait and see” approach. However, with telehealth, during the COVID-19 pandemic, [AARP’s research](#) and that of [other organizations](#) pointed to the dramatic uptick in the use of telehealth services among midlife and older adults, many of whom might not have otherwise adopted the technology as readily.

Since then, there has been a [leveling off of telehealth usage](#) as those who used such services out of necessity reverted to their previous patterns and as the healthcare industry works to upgrade its technology to enhance the patient-provider experience.

While concerns about privacy and a lack of a personal connection with one’s healthcare provider have declined significantly, challenges in using telehealth remain for those whose healthcare providers don’t offer telehealth services, for those who lack access to broadband (or who are unable to afford it), and for the less technologically savvy among us.



METHODOLOGY

Methodology

- **Objectives:** To explore the views of Americans ages 50 and older related to the use of telehealth services
- **Methodology:** Phone and online survey
- **Qualifications:** Ages 50 or older
- **Sample:** NORC Foresight 50+ panel, n=1,774
- **Interviewing Dates:** January 18-23, 2024
- **Weighting:** Data are weighted to the latest Current Population Survey (CPS) benchmarks developed by the U.S. Census Bureau and are balanced by gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, region, and AARP Membership. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults ages 50 and over.
- **Questionnaire length:** 5 minutes on average
- **Confidence Interval:** Total sample: $\pm 3.43\%$



About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org/about-aarp/, www.aarp.org/español or follow [@AARP](https://twitter.com/AARP), [@AARPenEspañol](https://twitter.com/AARPenEspañol) and [@AARPadvocates](https://twitter.com/AARPadvocates) on social media.

About NORC

NORC at the University of Chicago conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, NORC has studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today, NORC partners with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society. Please visit www.norc.org for more information



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