Smartphones and digital devices are no longer just for entertainment or work. Hospitals and doctors’ offices are experimenting with how “smart” devices can support health. For instance, more and more healthcare organizations [2] are offering telemedicine options, where you can have a video conference appointment, and are using personal monitoring devices for disease management. Access to broadband internet, smartphones, and other digital devices are key to these efforts. Some hospitals [3] are even outfitting patients with them as they leave, banking on these devices to help patients better manage their health. This isn’t (yet) the norm, though.

How prevalent is broadband access across the states? What is the prevalence of smartphones and wearables like FitBit to log data? To what degree do patients interact with their healthcare providers through technology today?

According to Pew Research Center [4], nearly two-thirds of all U.S. adults owned a smartphone in 2014. The percentage of low-income individuals, defined as those making less than $30,000 a year, who owned smartphones was significantly lower—only half owned a smartphone. The cost of maintaining access differs for families and individuals. According to the same Pew report, more than half of those paying for a family plan were paying between $100 and $200 per month for service and more than three quarters of people on individual plans were paying less than $100. Usage of health-related apps doubled between 2013 and 2015, up to almost one third of smartphone or tablet users, reports Forbes [5].

- Patients can securely message providers via electronic health records platforms, much like an e-mail. However, this capability hasn’t been adopted by hospitals in all states according to 2014 data [6]. Vermont leads the way; all its hospitals have this capability. In 21 states, less than 50 percent of hospitals had this capacity; in Alaska, only 11 percent of hospitals do. In the majority of states, that rate is higher than 50 percent.
- Patients cannot electronically view and download their hospital health records at uniform rates across the states, according to data from 2014 [6]. In Missouri, only one in five hospitals has this capability. In Vermont, all hospitals do. In 13 states, the rate is higher than three in four hospitals.
- According to analysis of the Current Population Survey July 2015 data, 92.6 percent of people nationwide use the Internet at home; 31 states exceeded that percentage. There are eight states with figures of non-usage exceeding 10 percent—Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.
- Digital wearables (like smart watches that can access the Internet) were much less prevalent according to 2015 CPS data. The highest rate is in Hawaii, at 6 percent. The lowest rates were in Minnesota, New Mexico and Oklahoma at 1 percent overall. Only 3.1 percent of respondents across the U.S. responded that they use a “wearable, Internet device.”
- Health monitoring devices that connect to the Internet were still not very common, but more so than general digital wearables. Nationally, 5.7 percent of respondents use a health monitoring device according to the CPS. Utah, the state with the highest rate, is approaching double digits at 9.9 percent. Mississippi and New Mexico had the lowest rates, both of which fell under 2 percent.
The vast majority of CPS respondents had cell or smartphones. The lowest percentage is in Vermont, at 89.2 percent, followed by North Dakota and West Virginia.

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