A first-of-its-kind study in Minnesota details a dramatic rise in the use of telemedicine in that state. Between 2010 and 2015, the state’s number of “virtual visits” jumped from 11,113 to 86,238. These new findings, the result of research conducted by the state Department of Health and University of Minnesota School of Public Health, show that telemedicine “may be emerging as an option to overcome some of the geographical barriers of accessing specialty care,” state Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm says.

In Minnesota’s nonmetropolitan areas, telemedicine was more commonly used by general practitioners to connect patients with specialists — for example, a primary care provider refers someone to a psychiatrist, or an emergency room doctor initiates a virtual visit with a neurologist to discuss caring for a stroke patient. Conversely, the majority of telemedicine services in metro areas involved non-emergency conditions, such as the common cold or strep throat, with consumers of commercial insurance visiting online with nurse practitioners.

According to Malcolm, this rise in telemedicine will require the state to look more closely at issues such as quality of care, broadband access, and new investments in telemedicine equipment.
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