



# The State of Digital Transformation in Healthcare

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## Executive takeaways

Here's what you'll learn from this survey report:

Digital transformation is more than a buzzword; it's an opportunity to foster collaboration, improve patient care and deliver a significant rate of return in healthcare—but getting there requires commitment, effort and investment.

Pressures from patients, payers and regulators to improve safety, access and quality of care while reducing costs are key drivers toward [adopting digital tools](#). Health systems view digital capabilities as a means of positively affecting their relationships with customers and transforming their operations and use of technology, leading to significant investments in digital transformation.

- 1 The potential for digital transformation to positively affect patient care.
- 2 The challenges healthcare facilities face in managing cybersecurity attacks and the ways unified communications can mitigate risks.
- 3 The importance of establishing or enhancing telehealth capabilities to reach underserved populations.
- 4 The ways digital initiatives can positively affect the bottom line while safeguarding critical data and improving privacy and security.

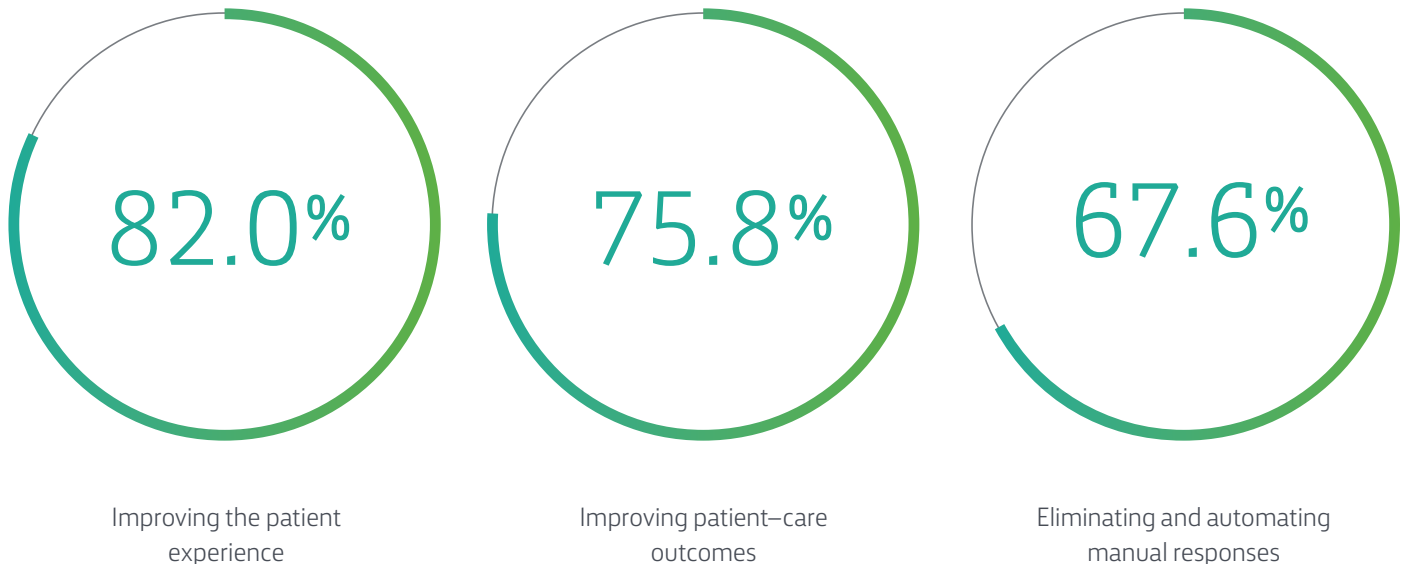
Global spending on digital transformation topped \$1.3 trillion and continues growing more than 10% year over year, but healthcare has been slow to [adopt digital innovations](#).

The COVID 19 pandemic accelerated the need for improved digital capacities that increased the use of consumer-facing technologies. By investing in digitalization, healthcare systems can provide a more patient-centric

experience while also ensuring the safety of the patients against ransomware attacks.

This exclusive Windstream Enterprise research report was done to understand the priorities, technology and future needs of decision-makers in the C-suite, clinical operations and information technology areas of healthcare. It underscores the importance of engaging stakeholders to successfully navigate the digital transformation journey.

**When asked how their organizations were prioritizing specific initiatives over the next 12 to 18 months, respondents rated these efforts as critical:**



## Finding #1

### Healthcare and technology go hand in hand

From electronic health records (EHR) and robotic surgeries to molecular medicine and artificial intelligence (AI), technology has transformed healthcare. The expansion of [digital tools](#) also helps health systems reduce medical errors, protect patient privacy, prevent adverse drug reactions, monitor patient compliance and aid in medical research.

Digital tools have also profoundly affected how health systems and providers communicate with patients. Telehealth, virtual consultations and remote monitoring skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a [study](#) of 5.7 million nationwide patient data interactions, the use of broadcast messages between providers and patients was 37 times higher than pre-pandemic, and the survey data found that more than 73% of healthcare leaders anticipated significant increases in telehealth visits during the next 12 to 18 months.

# 37x

The use of broadcast messages between providers and patients was 37 times higher than pre-pandemic.

# 73%

of healthcare leaders anticipated significant increases in telehealth visits during the next 12 to 18 months.

#### Healthcare technology that health systems are prioritizing:



AI and machine learning-driven clinical tools



Cloud-based phones



Contact center services



Digital pathology



Electronic fax solution



Genomic sequencing



Internet of medical things (IoMT)



Patient portals



Remote patient monitoring



Self-triage



Telehealth solutions



Video chat

Significant changes in patient-provider communication were also expected, with 63.4% of respondents expecting the use of digital patient communication to increase significantly over the next 12 to 18 months. As a result, digitizing intake processes or establishing self-service portals; enhancing patient communication through tools such as chatbots, SMS reminders, patient portal, emails and automated phone calls; and improving patient access were cited as top organizational initiatives.

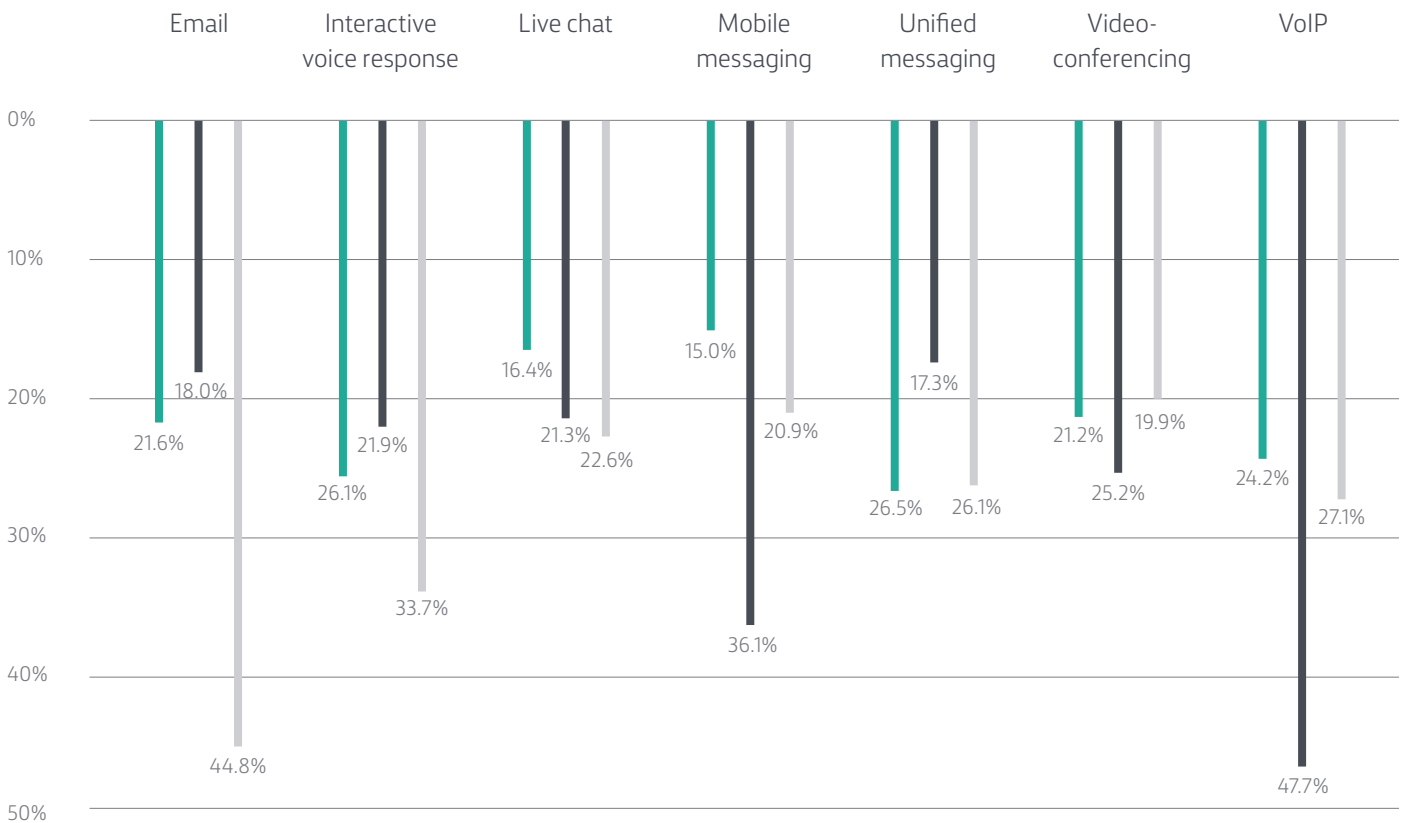
63.4%

of respondents expecting the use of digital patient communication to increase significantly over the next 12 to 18 months

Digital transformation in healthcare gives patients more opportunities to communicate with providers and avoid unnecessary appointments or trips to the hospital, saving time, reducing travel and costs, and making the healthcare experience more efficient.

**In the past 18 months, how frequently has your organization communicated with patients through the following channels?**

■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Very often



## Finding #2

### IT decisions affect patient care

Digital transformation is essential for providing patient-centered care. Digital tools allow providers to minimize repetitive and analog tasks, freeing up more time for patient care, and enable health systems to provide proactive, rather than reactive, care. Moreover, [digital healthcare tools](#) such as telemedicine promote health equity by delivering services to previously hard-to-reach communities, closing gaps in access to primary healthcare and improving health outcomes in traditionally marginalized and underserved communities.

Investing in digital transformation can also help safeguard critical data. Currently, healthcare organizations have an average of 10,000 connected medical devices, and one-third are unpatchable, making them prime targets for hackers and generating significant risks to patient safety and security concerns. Besides disconnecting unnecessary medical devices from healthcare networks, organizations that prioritize third-party software and services to [improve medical device security](#) can help mitigate risk and protect data.

Concerns about cybersecurity risks are also high. More than 28% of respondents expected cybersecurity threats to increase, while 63.7% expected threats to “increase significantly” over the next 12 to 18 months. [Cyberattacks](#) not only give criminals access to patient health, demographic and financial data that compromises their privacy and security, but they also erode trust in healthcare.

Data breaches are also costly for institutions. The average cost of a data breach in the United States in 2022 was \$9.44 million—over twice the global average—and the cost of a breach in the healthcare industry has increased 42% since 2020, according to the [latest IBM research](#).

Despite the potential damage from a data breach, the survey data found that just over half (54.2%) of respondents felt identifying and managing cyber-risks was “critical” to their organization and that just 11.8% felt “very confident” in their ability to mitigate potential cyber-risks after implementing the latest digital technologies in their organizations (24.6% of respondents were “not confident” in their abilities to mitigate the risk).

Compared with two years ago, the number of cyber incidents has:

8.5%



Decreased

27.2%



Stayed the same

37.7%



Increased

19.3%



My organization hasn't had any cyber incidents

7.2%



Don't know/not sure

## Finding #3

### Telehealth presents challenges and opportunities

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth accounted for less than 1% of medical appointments; use of telehealth, including audio and video (telemedicine) and web-based, mobile application, email and text messages, jumped to 80% in areas with high pandemic prevalence.

The expansion of telehealth improved access to healthcare, especially among Medicare and Medicaid recipients; patients who identified as Black, Latino or multiracial; and those making less than \$75,000 per year, indicating that telehealth could help ensure equitable access to healthcare.

But barriers can limit access to telehealth services, including limited technology and device ownership and lack of broadband access.

Establishing or enhancing telehealth capabilities topped the list of patient-centric initiatives for 37% of survey respondents. Integrating clinical practice appointments with EHR data and diagnostic data with telehealth solution is another highly

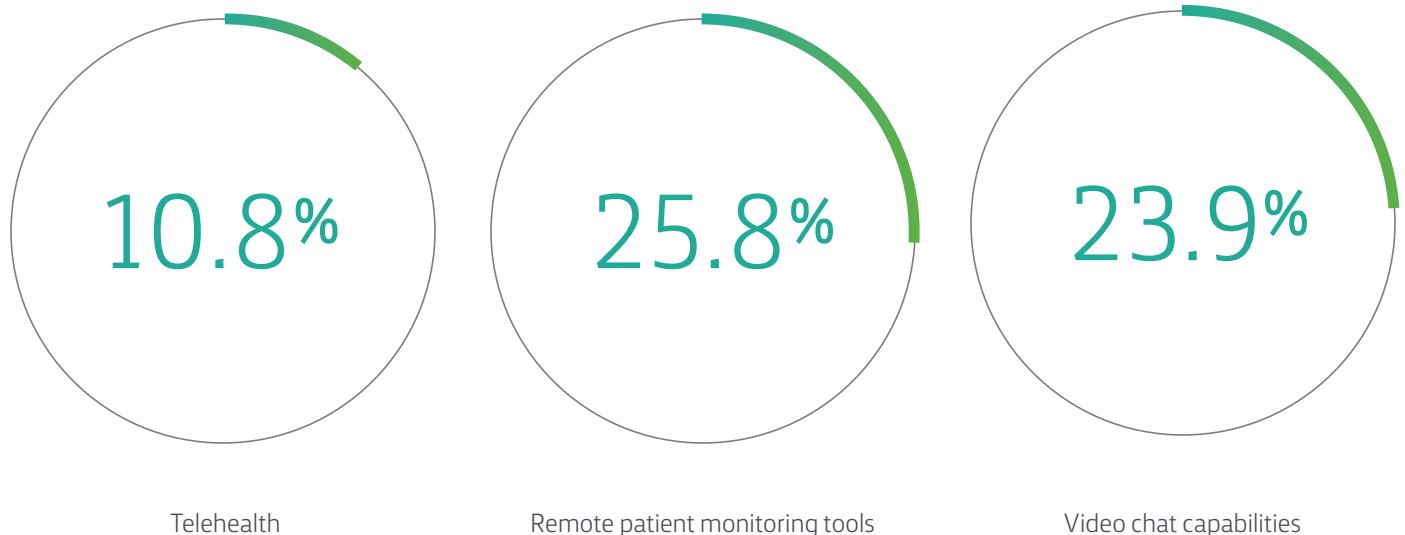
ranked priority, with 31% of respondents ranking this as a top three initiative.

Meeting the increased demand for telehealth also raises concerns. Of the healthcare leaders surveyed, 44.3% agreed telehealth demand had exacerbated cyber-risk and compliance concerns in their organizations, and 35.7% strongly agreed.

Maximizing telemedicine solutions takes time. Over the next 12 to 18 months, 10.8% of respondents plans to consider or evaluate their telehealth plans; 25.8% plans to consider or evaluate their remote patient monitoring tools; and 23.9% plans to consider or evaluate their video chat capabilities. More than one quarter of respondents had adopted patient-engagement tools, such as virtual assistants and chatbots, but were considering further investments.

Establishing key performance indicators along the digital journey and setting realistic timelines for telemedicine initiatives will lead to long-term success.

**Over the next 12 to 18 months, respondents planned to consider or evaluate their:**



## Finding #4

### Technology can improve ROI

In 2022, 61% of the healthcare leaders surveyed had increased budgets for digital solutions over the previous year, and 42% were looking for more specialized applications, infrastructure and systems, with more than half of respondents expressing preferences for fewer vendors.

Investments in digital transformation are paying dividends. [One survey](#) found that 92% of health systems that invested in digital tools achieved better consumer satisfaction and engagement, while 56% reported improved patient-care quality.

Although digital transformation requires an upfront cost, the [investments](#) could also aid in data collection and predictive analytics that increase outcome-based payments, detect illness and predict outcomes to boost efficiency, and identify uncompensated care costs.

When evaluating digital initiatives at their organizations, 36% of respondents ranked the costs of implementation as one of the most important factors; it was tied with immediate realization for return on investment as the top consideration.

An investment in digital tools could provide immediate ROI in the event of a cyberattack.

In 2022, it took an average of nine months to identify and contain a data breach. Investing in technology, including fully deployed artificial intelligence and automation programs that could help identify and contain [data breaches](#) in 200 days or less helped organizations save an average of \$1.12 million.

Digital transformation in healthcare offers what healthcare leaders value most: improved patient experience, enhancing patient communications and immediate realization of return on investments.

#### Top three benefits of adopting a best-in-class digital toolkit.

56%

Cyber-risk mitigation

50%

Patient satisfaction

47%

Operational efficiency

## Conclusion

Successful digital transformation in healthcare requires the right partner. Windstream Enterprise can help with a secure, reliable network and cloud-based solutions. With Windstream Enterprise on your team, digital transformation is accessible and efficient, putting your healthcare organization in the best position to achieve successful outcomes.

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## Cloud-enabled connectivity, communications and security—guaranteed.

Windstream Enterprise drives business transformation through the convergence of our proprietary software solutions and cloud-optimized network to unlock our clients' revenue and profitability potential. Our managed services streamline operations, enhance productivity and elevate the experience of our clients and their end users while securing their critical data and brand reputation. Analysts certify Windstream Enterprise as a market leader for our product innovation, and clients rely on our unrivaled service guarantees and best-in-class management portal. Businesses trust Windstream Enterprise as their single-source for a highperformance network and awardwinning suite of connectivity, collaboration and security solutions—delivered by a team of technology experts whose success is directly tied to our clients' complete satisfaction.

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