

7,263 views | Apr 9, 2019, 07:00am EDT

Five Ways Millennials Do Health Care Their Own Way



GHOSTWRITTEN BY

Victoria L. Wilcox, Ph.D

(Published byline removed as a courtesy to the client)



Millennials, sometimes also called Generation Y, were growing up when the internet put information from around the world at their fingertips. They led the way in using messaging, social media and mobile devices to stay in touch with people 24/7. Yet, as many of them sought jobs, the Great Recession hit. These experiences, as well as their sheer numbers, make them formidable health care consumers.

“Millennials are going to take the wheel and shape the road ahead in health care,” predicted [Jean Hippert](#) of PNC Healthcare in 2015. Case in point: They now comprise a fourth of all Americans.

While the dates bookending their generation vary with the source, Pew Research has deemed all people born between the years of [1981 and 1996](#) as millennials. Now they are, as millennials say, “adulting.” As they make health care decisions for themselves and their families, their choices could shake up the industry. Here are five ways they're doing just that:

1. Millennials want digital access to health care services.

More tech-minded than baby boomers, 92% of millennials own smartphones, and over half own tablets, reports the [Pew Research Center](#). Nearly all millennials use the internet, which many access only by smartphone. As for social media, 82% use Facebook. About half use Instagram; ditto for Snapchat.

Millennials and members of Generation X want to access their recommendations, services and payment options online. For instance, [a study](#) conducted at a New York City health center found them more likely than other generations to use its patient portal.

In a [Salesforce survey](#), 6 out of 10 of millennials support telemedicine, such as video chats, instead of in-person visits. Even more want their doctor to give them a mobile app for booking appointments, reviewing health records and managing their preventive care. Most would consider wearable devices that share health data with their doctors, as well as pills that track vital signs once swallowed.

2. Millennials seek medical information from various sources, not just physicians.

“Millennials have lived through the financial crisis, 9-11, skyrocketing academic debt and one of the most divisive and controversial elections in history,” wrote [Lynn O’Connor Vos](#), then of Grayhealth Group. “It’s no wonder, then, that they tend to mistrust authority.”

In a [survey by Grayhealth and Kantar Health](#), just 41% of millennials noted that they trust physicians as the best source of health information. Barely a fourth agreed that doctors and pharmacists give them the information they need to make decisions.

Millennials are more inclined than baby boomers to research health care online. These relatively well-educated 20- and 30-somethings compare treatment options and check quality ratings of doctors and hospitals. They consult friends, family, blogs, message boards and websites like WebMD and Mayo Clinic. However, all that information can hinder their decision making.

3. Millennials want cost transparency.

More likely to be unemployed than prior generations were at their age,

millennials fret about health care costs. In 2017, the [Employee Benefit Research Institute](#) (EBRI), in collaboration with Greenwald and Associates, polled more than 3,560 adults with health insurance. Across generations, millennials were most likely to report researching costs online, investigating whether their insurance covered their care and discussing treatment costs with a doctor.

A [PNC poll](#) found that millennials are more willing than older patients to request an upfront price estimate. One in two said they would delay or skip health care because of costs.

4. Millennials, not primary care doctors, orchestrate their care.

In the EBRI survey, only 67% of millennials reported having a primary care provider, compared to 78% of Gen Xers, and 85% of boomers. Many doubted their primary care provider could handle complex health matters. As such, most millennials depend more on themselves than their primary care doctor to make medical decisions.

“The locus of control is shifting from the primary care provider to the patient,” said Hippert in her PNC presentation.

Waiting days or weeks for a medical appointment seems nuts to millennials. Instead, PNC found that about a third of them sought care at a retail clinic in the past year.

5. Millennials view health holistically.

“To millennials, exercise and nutrition are as essential to health care as antibiotics are to curing infection,” wrote O’Connor Vos in her Fortune article.

Their view of health encompasses more than a lack of disease. It also includes fitness and mental well-being. The EBRI study found that millennials are more likely than baby boomers to join wellness programs, such as those offering help with quitting smoking or managing stress.

How To Connect With Millennials

Millennials expect easy access to information about their health and health care. They seek user-friendly patient portals, digital contact with providers, transparent pricing and prompt, convenient care. Even with this knowledge, many health care providers are caught unprepared when working with millennial patients.

To meet millennials' expectations, businesses and providers should strengthen their digital presence through websites, patient portals, social media and apps. They should request testimonials and reviews, as well as provide patient-friendly information in an easy-to-read format. For millennials, transparency and convenience are of utmost importance, so providers should do whatever they can to cater to these needs.

Remove unnecessary industry jargon and complicated information from your website, and millennials will have a much easier time consulting your organization for their health care needs. Posting prices online, as many retail clinics do, will help build millennials' trust, assuming they find them accurate. Online payment options will also help health care organizations catch up with other businesses.

Many [primary care practices are responding](#) to millennials' desire for quick, convenient care. To avoid losing patients to walk-in clinics, they are hiring more physicians and nurse practitioners. They are offering digital

ways for patients to communicate with them and schedule appointments. Some are considering telemedicine.

In the end, health care organizations, groups and businesses need to embrace the digital technology that their millennial patients are so eager to use on a daily basis. If you don't foster stronger relationships with them in a way that new startups are already doing, you will likely be left behind.

[Forbes Technology Council](#) is an invitation-only community for world-class CIOs, CTOs and technology executives. ***Do I qualify?***

[Print](#)

[Site Feedback](#)

[Tips](#)

[Corrections](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

[Terms](#)

[Privacy](#)

© 2020 Forbes Media LLC. All Rights Reserved.

[AdChoices](#)

ADVERTISEMENT
