

COVID-19 Update: The Rise of Telemedicine - Benefiting Patients and Providers

Gavin Clingham, JD, Director of Public Policy, and the AfPA Governmental Affairs Team, Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA)

The Alliance for Patient Access (allianceforpatientaccess.org), founded in 2006, is a national network of physicians dedicated to ensuring patient access to approved therapies and appropriate clinical care. AfPA accomplishes this mission by recruiting, training and mobilizing policy-minded physicians to be effective advocates for patient access. AfPA is organized as a non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation and headed by an independent board of directors. Its physician leadership is supported by policy advocacy management and public affairs consultants. In 2012, AfPA established the Institute for Patient Access (IfPA), a related 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. In keeping with its mission to promote a better understanding of the benefits of the physician-patient relationship in the provision of quality healthcare, IfPA sponsors policy research and educational programming.



Healthcare insurers, patients, and providers have all been quick to incorporate telemedicine into their routines, another sign of how COVID-19 is changing healthcare delivery.

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COVID-19 has made accessing in-person care more difficult, some areas have restricted travel, some sites of care have been limited, and some patients fear risks of exposure when seeking routine and even emergency care. But health care professionals know that a missed diagnosis or delayed or skipped treatments

can be just as harmful to patients' health.

As a result, healthcare insurers, led by Medicare and private insurers, rapidly expanded access to telemedicine temporarily to meet this need. Can telemedicine work for pediatric patients as well?

Appropriate Telemedicine Services for Pediatric Patients

Telemedicine can cover any number of services and types of visits regardless of a patient's age. Many insurers already cover telemedicine for behavioral health needs among the pediatric population. Telemedicine might also be appropriate for common medical conditions that are already diagnosed based on an image or phone call from the patients. Services delivered in this manner can, for example, be used for assessment, diagnosis, intervention, consultation, and supervision across any distance.

Examples of services where a video visit can provide you with enough information to diagnose are common rashes or prescribing antibiotics for conjunctivitis. Telehealth can also be useful for follow-up visits after a recent in-person appointment or prescribing prescription refills.

Telemedicine will not be able to meet all healthcare needs but is an exciting option that healthcare providers and patients should explore.

Coverage and Reimbursement Policies

Providers must remain aware that telemedicine coverage policies vary widely. In addition to private health insurers' policies, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has been encouraging states to expand coverage through both Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). To help answer questions, CMS released a [State Medicaid & CHIP Telehealth Toolkit](#) to urge States to implement the flexibilities that they have and to make it easier for them to apply for waivers if necessary.

CMS makes clear that States have a great deal of flexibility with respect to covering Medicaid and CHIP services provided via telehealth. States have the option to determine whether (or not) to utilize telehealth; what types of services to cover; where in the state it can be utilized; how it is implemented; what types of practitioners or providers may deliver services via telehealth, as long as such practitioners or providers are "recognized" and qualified according to Medicaid federal and state statute and regulation; and reimbursement rates.

Importantly, CMS makes clear that States are not required to submit a state plan amendment (SPA) to pay for services delivered via telehealth if payments for services furnished via telehealth are made in the same manner as when the service is furnished in a face-to-face setting.

References:

1. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/downloads/medicaid-chip-telehealth-toolkit.pdf>

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Corresponding Author



Gavin Clingham, JD
Director of Public Policy
Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA) Government Affairs Team
1275 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 1100A Washington, DC
20004-2417
202-499-4114
info@allianceforpatientaccess.org

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