

Telehealth is Essential, COVID-19 and Beyond

Telehealth Expansion in Response to COVID

When the pandemic hit California, health care providers jumped into action to care for COVID+ patients, while also ensuring ongoing access to care for all patients. **To protect patients and frontline workers and help reduce the spread of COVID-19, many health care providers dramatically shifted from in-person clinic services to video and audio-only phone visits.**

This shift in care was facilitated by new flexibilities granted during the public health emergency by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which expanded the types of telehealth services covered by Medi-Cal.

Key changes include coverage of audio-only phone visits, and expanded telehealth at Federally Qualified Health Centers.

California's public health care systems are using telehealth to provide a range of services, including:



- primary and specialty care
- chronic disease management
- bedside consults for patients in the hospital
- behavioral health support
- care coordination

Medi-Cal Must Address the Impending Telehealth Cliff

Even when it is safe to fully re-open, **we cannot ignore that patients and providers have experienced better ways of delivering care through telehealth in recent months. These new flexibilities should not be taken away simply because the pandemic is behind us.**



We urge the Legislature to:

Adopt budget trailer bill language to allow temporarily authorized Medi-Cal telehealth flexibilities, including audio-only phone visits, to be extended permanently

The flexibilities that patients and providers are relying upon today will end whenever the federal government lifts the public health emergency. However, the imperative to physically distance will be with us for the foreseeable future.

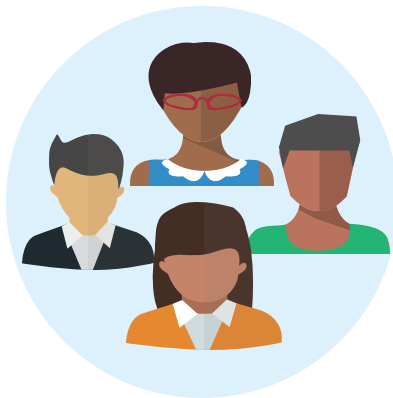
Because we cannot predict when the federal government will use its discretion to end the emergency period, it is critical that California take action as soon as possible to maintain access to the expanded telehealth benefits long term.

The Value of Telehealth in Medi-Cal



Access

Telehealth is an appropriate alternative to many types of in-person care. We need all care modalities available to ensure timely access for those in need.



Equity

Patient-centered care through the convenience of telehealth is the new standard of care. Medi-Cal must evolve with the rest of the health care industry to achieve health equity for low-income Californians.



Quality

Traditional visits don't work for everyone and the consequences of delayed and avoided care can be devastating. Increasing take-up of primary, preventive, and chronic disease care, via telehealth, results in better health outcomes and lower total costs to Medi-Cal over the long term.

Maintaining Medi-Cal's Expansion of Telehealth Services Can Help Save and Improve Countless Lives

- the single parent who didn't lose half a day's pay to get care
- the stay-at-home mom who finally got answers because she didn't have to arrange childcare
- the farmworker who didn't take three buses to travel to the clinic
- the young man who talks to a psychologist for the first time because he didn't have to face the stigma of walking into a mental health clinic
- the immune-compromised child who didn't sit in a crowded waiting room

Act Now! We urge the Legislature to adopt budget trailer bill language to allow temporarily authorized Medi-Cal telehealth flexibilities, including audio-only phone visits, to be extended permanently.