

SUPPORT COMPETITIVE, FAIR REIMBURSEMENT RATES FOR TELEHEALTH SB 2179

Due to the pandemic, increased flexibilities and broader insurance coverage for telehealth services made it possible for health care professionals to continue treating patients and increase access to care.

- Payment parity – or equal reimbursement rates - would ensure patients have increased access to timely, value-based, and integrated care, especially for rural and underserved communities throughout the state. Under current law, health plans reimburse telehealth services 20% to 40% lower than in-person services.
- By continuing to utilize virtual visits, health care professionals and hospitals alike will be able to provide three very important elements, which are:
 - Continuity of care – Virtual visits allow patients to be cared for by their care team or an extension of this team – not a third party from a national vendor.
 - Access to the entire patient record – Virtual visits ensure that nothing is left unaddressed with regard to patients' past medical history, medication lists, previous health events, etc.
 - Access to comprehensive and integrated health care – Virtual visits allow providers to easily hand over care needs to other members of the health care team, such as future testing needs, follow up, or referrals to a specialist – all of which can be done within electronic medical records systems to ensure that the patient is receiving comprehensive care. This is not easily done with a third party like Teledoc or AmWell.

While telehealth cannot replace all patient care, the extension of telehealth benefits in recent months has rapidly changed the way health care professionals see patients. The advancements provided a push for innovation that now allow health care providers to safely increase access to high quality care, particularly in the rural health care setting.

Historically, access to rural health care has been met with challenges and the advancement of telehealth carries its benefits to rural health care professionals and how they are able to treat patients. This revolutionary approach to health care services can reduce or minimize challenges and burdens patients encounter, such as transportation issues related to traveling for specialty care. Telehealth can also improve monitoring, timeliness, and communications within the healthcare system.

Key telehealth benefits extended to patients provide more accessibility for care:

- For patients who are unable to use video software and patients who lack broadband access or technology for video-only, the current ability to reach patients virtually or over telephone has been critical to ensuring continuity of care.
- When patients have access to timely comprehensive care, chronic medical conditions can be addressed sooner; thus, when treatment is more easily accessible, the need for emergency care services is most likely reduced - resulting in health care cost savings for both the patient and insurers.

We urge you to support payment parity for telehealth services to ensure that these services are reimbursed at the same rate as services provided in-person.

