



ISSUE

Increase access to care through expanded telehealth coverage

MMA Position

The continued expanded coverage of telehealth services is essential to ensure that all individuals have access to high quality healthcare. The MMA supports changes to telehealth laws that allow for the continued coverage of healthcare provided through audio-only (telephone) services for all Minnesotans.

Background

The use of telehealth services has expanded significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A major change that has resulted in a portion of this increase is the reimbursement of telephone-only services at the same rate as a traditional telehealth visit. Telehealth is not a substitute for in-person care, it is simply another way of delivering care to ensure that all people have access to care. The MMA supports efforts that address health disparities and ensure that all individuals have access to the same high-quality care.

Telehealth has been shown to increase access to care for adolescents, older patients, veterans, and individuals located in rural locations, and those who have transportation barriers and mobility issues.¹ Telehealth has also been instrumental in managing chronic diseases by allowing providers to connect with patients over extended periods of time.

Telephone-only visits are also necessary to address obstacles to care. A recent Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services study showed that ethnic minority groups and rural tribal groups prefer telehealth that is provided by telephone and not via the internet.² Minnesota must move to allow permanent coverage of telephone-only visits and must cover a telephone-only visit at the same rate as a traditional telehealth visit. The quality of care received through a

telephone-only visit can be the same quality of care a patient would receive with an in-person, or traditional telehealth visit. Through a telephone-only visit, patients without access to internet/broadband can receive uninterrupted care without the inconvenience of travel and wait times.

In 2021, the Legislature passed the Minnesota Telehealth Act,³ which expanded telehealth in Minnesota and extended payment parity to include telephone-only visits through June 30, 2023. The Legislature must act to permanently require payment parity between telephone-only visits and in-person visits to ensure that all Minnesotans can access high quality care.

Talking Points

- The MMA supports improving access to healthcare for all individuals by ensuring that all individuals have access to telehealth services, including audio-only services.
- All telehealth services must be reimbursed at the same rate as an in-person visit.
- Broadband access must be expanded throughout the state.

¹ Minnesota Department of Human Services, Telemedicine Utilization Report: Telehealth and Telemedicine during the COVID-19 Pandemic, December 16, 2020 [Available at Telemedicine Utilization Report (mn.gov)]

² Minnesota Department of Human Services, Telemedicine Utilization Report: Telehealth and Telemedicine during the COVID-19 Pandemic, December 16, 2020 [Available at Telemedicine Utilization Report (mn.gov)]

³ Minnesota Session Laws – 2021, 1st Special Session. Chapter 7. Article 6 [Available at Chapter 7 - MN Laws]