



## ISSUE

# Ensuring Continued Coverage of Telehealth and Telephone Services

## MMA Position

It is essential to continue the expanded coverage of telehealth services to ensure that all individuals have access to high quality health care. The MMA supports changes to telehealth laws that will support the continued availability and coverage of telehealth and telephone services for all Minnesotans.

## Background

The use of telehealth services has expanded significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, only 14 percent of Americans stated that they had received health services through a telehealth visit at least once. This is in stark contrast to a survey conducted after the start of the pandemic showing that almost 69 percent of all health visits were conducted via a telehealth visit.<sup>1</sup> Two major changes that have resulted in this increase include covering services provided in the patient's home and covering telephone-only services.

Telehealth is not a substitute for in-person care, it is simply another way of delivering care to ensure that the most people have access to that care. The MMA supports efforts that address health disparities and ensure that all individuals have access to the same high-quality care.

Telephone-only visits are necessary to address obstacles to care. A recent Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services study showed that ethnic minority and rural tribal groups prefer telehealth that is provided by telephone.<sup>2</sup> Five states have already moved to allow permanent coverage of telephone-only visits.

The quality of care received through a telehealth visit can be the same quality of care a patient would receive at an in-person visit. Through telehealth, patients can

receive uninterrupted care without the inconvenience of travel and wait times.

The expanded coverages were the result of Gov. Tim Walz's executive orders. The Legislature must act to maintain these coverages or they will expire on June 30, 2021.

## Talking Points

- The MMA supports improving access to health care for all individuals by:
  - Covering services via telehealth provided in a patient's home.
  - Covering first visits via telehealth.
  - Covering telephone-only services to a patient.
  - Allowing a provider to determine whether a telehealth or in-person visit is needed.
- Telehealth services must be reimbursed at the same rate as an in-person visit.
- Broadband access must be expanded throughout the state.

<sup>1</sup> State Telehealth Policy Framework, Accessed Dec. 28, 2020 – <https://medicalalley.org/2020/10/state-telehealth-policy-framework/>

<sup>2</sup> DHS Telemedicine Utilization Report, Accessed Dec. 28, 2020 – [https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/telemedicine-utilization-report-2020\\_tcm1053-458660.pdf](https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/telemedicine-utilization-report-2020_tcm1053-458660.pdf)