

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR TELEMENTAL HEALTH



COORDINATED
BEHAVIORAL
CARE

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way behavioral healthcare is delivered—interactions between providers and clients shifted from in-person to telephonic/audio-visual means of engagement and service delivery. The temporary regulatory changes that were enacted at the federal and state level enabled this transition to new modalities of virtual care that proved critical for the continuity of care for many of New York’s most vulnerable individuals.

Coordinated Behavioral Care’s [Telemental Health Position paper](#) is informed by our relationship with over fifty community-based health and human service organizations throughout NYC serving more than 100,000 Medicaid clients.

COORDINATED BEHAVIORAL CARE IS ADVOCATING FOR:

1. PERMANENT REGULATORY RELIEF FOR TELEMENTAL HEALTH

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, substantial regulatory relief was extended to providers by both local and national governing bodies. Providers and telehealth vendors have worked together to deliver safe and effective care, setting the stage for a new and more expansive service delivery methodology. CBC recommends the formal adoption of many of these regulatory waivers, such as expanded location of service, use of audio-only interactions and increased provider/client choice.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE FLEXIBILITIES FOR TELEMENTAL HEALTH

Administrative and workflow flexibility have, in the short-term, yielded promising results and warrant consideration for permanent adoption. Examples of promising temporary workflows include streamlining documentation requirements and reducing redundant or obstructive confidentiality requirements. These flexibilities have been especially essential for the population struggling with substance use disorder/opioid use disorder (SUD/OD) during the pandemic.

3. ENHANCE WORKFORCE CAPACITY

As a result of relaxed workforce requirements, providers have been able to meet the needs of clients in a responsive manner during the pandemic. CBC recommends the relevant guidelines be made permanent, including those allowing providers licensed in New York but living out-of-state to offer telemental health services remotely. If a client is having difficulty with “technical literacy” that may prevent treatment engagement, BH providers should be able to support them and include this as billable time.

4. EQUITABLE PAYMENT/RATES

Telehealth has been shown to increase access and adherence to care through a combination of reduced barriers (like travel) and practice management tools (like appointment reminders). CBC recommends leveraging technology to promote more reliable and effective engagement efforts, as the sector shifts from fee-for-service (FFS) payment models to ones that focus on outcomes. Until such models are determined, CBC recommends that parity in payment and rates for services remain and that telehealth is reimbursed at the same rate as in-person treatment.

ABOUT CBC

Coordinated Behavioral Care (CBC) is a member-led, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of care for New Yorkers with serious mental illness, chronic health conditions and/or substance use disorders. CBC seeks to create a healthcare environment where New Yorkers negatively impacted by social determinants of health and those with BH problems receive coordinated, individualized and culturally competent community-based care that is effective in preventing and managing chronic physical and BH conditions.