



Advocates Call on State Leaders to Support Robust Telehealth Program

Today, two statewide advocacy organizations representing primary care and behavioral health care providers issued a White Paper, *“Ensuring Sustained Access to Telehealth in the Post Pandemic Period”* calling on state leaders to make permanent many of the telehealth changes that have been implemented during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) and the New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (‘The Council’) issued a joint White Paper recommending New York State permanently remove barriers to the provision of telehealth visits for all New Yorkers after the COVID-19 pandemic disaster declarations have expired. Increased use of telehealth has allowed primary care, mental health and substance use disorder care recipients who cannot physically visit a healthcare professional in person to use their phone or computer to access the services they need. The groups argue that these advances, and the state granted flexibilities that led to them, should be made permanent because:

1. True person-centered services meet individuals where they are most comfortable receiving care, whether that is in an office setting or from their home;
2. In-person care is not equally accessible to all New Yorkers; many people experience barriers that inhibit their ability to receive in-person care, including barriers related to transportation and childcare; and,
3. Accessible, comprehensive primary and behavioral health care improves health and wellbeing, preventing avoidable and emergent conditions and lowering costs across the health system.

Towards the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis New York State streamlined regulations so providers could rapidly adopt telehealth to meet the needs of care recipients who were sheltering in place. Nearly four months after these changes, providers have collected important information from the individuals they serve as well as from their staff. For instance, in most instances care recipient no show rates have decreased while overall satisfaction with services has increased. The two groups argue that unless the current COVID-related flexibilities are made permanent, New Yorkers who are reluctant to travel or visit a healthcare setting will discontinue their services.

“We have seen what health care providers and government can do when we work together and put patients first, and that philosophy of care needs to continue,” said Rose Duhan, CHCANYS President and CEO. “Our patients continue to face huge obstacles due to the COVID-19 pandemic; getting access to their caregivers should not be one of them.”

“COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the emotional wellbeing of so many New Yorkers” said Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. “Now more than ever, all New Yorkers deserve access to high quality mental health

and substance use disorder/addiction services utilizing innovations that make care accessible. Our goal to achieve healthcare equity depends on our willingness to tear down barriers that prevent access to care. Thoughtful use of technology can be a powerful tool of change. We look forward to working with state leaders to ensure NYS capitalizes on what we've learned over the last 4 months."

In the White Paper, the NYS Council and CHCANYS recommend the State adhere to four core principles for determining the future of New York's Telehealth Program:

1. Utilize telehealth to increase access and promote health equity by supporting the full range of telehealth modalities.
2. Maximize regulatory flexibilities to sustain telehealth adoption.
3. Clinicians, in collaboration with clients, determine when a telehealth visit is appropriate.
4. Reimburse telehealth visits on par with in-person visits to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated continuum of care.

The full paper, which can be read [here](#), includes post-pandemic recommendations that will ensure safety net providers can continue providing care for the people who need it most.

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