



ACTION ALERT

Advocacy Needed on Telehealth

We have recently confirmed that NYS does NOT need federal approval to reimburse behavioral health telehealth services (including audio only) on par with face-to-face services. ***What this means is that we need to conduct a full court press to ensure lawmakers pass a bill this session that ensures rate parity for all telehealth services.***

As you are aware, telehealth has shown great potential in expanding and ensuring access to behavioral health and primary care. It is an important aspect of holistic person-centered care that must remain available for the tens of thousands of individuals who receive services through the public mental hygiene system as well as for private health plan beneficiaries. We need your support of **A.6256/S.5505**.

This legislation:

1. Requires payment parity for telehealth services to ensure that this modality is valued at the same rate as in-person care. In order for care recipients to continue to access telehealth services, there must be robust networks of providers delivering these services within their communities. Failure to reimburse telephonic visits on par with in-person visits will reduce access to and continuity of care for some populations, potentially exacerbating existing health inequities. Payment parity is fundamental to our commitment to reducing health disparities throughout the healthcare delivery system.
2. Extends payment parity beyond Medicaid. In order to achieve true equity in health care access, New York must require that payment parity occurs across all lines of business. Without this guarantee, providers will not have the financial capabilities to address major increases in demand for care that are expected in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, a bifurcated system where only some care recipients can access telehealth services is problematic to the Legislature's stated goals of promoting high quality care and equitable access.
3. Prohibits "client steering" and other access restrictions. This legislation requires insurers to cover patients' preferred telehealth providers in the same way the provider would be covered for an in-person visit - a critical protection for the individuals we serve. Further, the bill also clarifies that patients qualify for telehealth services without an initial in-person visit, unless the provider determines it is clinically necessary.

The bill in the Senate goes to the Finance Committee this week. We ask that you please call your lawmakers in support of A.6256/S.5505, especially those on the Senate Finance Committee. Share examples with them of how you have used telehealth throughout this pandemic, how important it has become to your client population, and the response you have received from clients and staff.

Use the links below to identify your representatives and urge them to support this legislation!

Senate Finance Committee: <https://www.nysenate.gov/committees/finance>

Find your Senate Rep here: <https://www.nysenate.gov/find-my-senator>

Find your Assembly Rep here: <https://nyassembly.gov/mem/search/>

Thank you for your assistance! If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the NYS Council, at 518-461-8200 or at lauri@nyscouncil.org.