

May 2020

MOVING FORWARD WITH TELEHEALTH

The TAMHO providers are appreciative to Governor Lee, TennCare and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for allowing us the opportunity during COVID 19 to serve individuals in our community through the use of telehealth, whether that be through video or telephonic technology.

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- Through this process, we have learned many things:
 - Many individuals are receptive to telehealth resources, including televideo and telephonic.
 - Individuals continue to have positive outcomes using telehealth.
 - Providers have seen engagement from many individuals who have not been receptive to treatment in the past.
 - Effective Evidence Based Tools have been used with telehealth with very positive outcomes.
 - Telehealth is not the best option for everyone, but has been shown to be an effective source of treatment for many.
 - Many individuals who lack internet connectivity or sufficient data, or who are not comfortable with the tele-video platform, have been receptive to telephonic service delivery.
- While at first glance it would seem that utilizing telehealth would decrease a provider's cost, what we have found is:
 - Initially, there was an increase in cost to implement this service on a broad scale due to the need to purchase additional hardware, software and data capacity.
 - After the initial increase in cost, we have noted that the time spent for service delivery and documentation did not change and therefore the cost to deliver the service remained the same.
 - In many cases, there is a need to spend additional time preparing for a telehealth session, although this seems to decrease over time.
 - Being service-oriented providers, our staff are our most valuable resource and our largest expense. The need for high quality staff has not decreased and staff costs have not decreased.
 - There is no significant cost difference when providing services via telehealth versus in-person.
- Looking ahead, the TAMHO providers would like the option to continue providing HIPPA approved telehealth treatment, including tele-video and telephonic. We feel that this could represent cost savings to the state and TennCare over time.

A research study published in the Telemedicine Journal and E-Health in 2013 evaluated the effectiveness of telehealth across multiple populations. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3662387/>

To share a few of their findings:

- In evaluating telehealth use with 768 adult outpatient individuals, video reduced "unneeded" hospitalizations.
- In evaluating telehealth use with 128 adults with depression and/or schizoaffective disorder, video equals in-person functioning scores at 6-month follow-up.

- In evaluating telehealth use with 384 adult Veterans, depression outcomes were equal for video and in-person, as were adherence, satisfaction and cost.
- In evaluating telehealth use with 128 children, video and in-person outcomes were equal in reducing depression over 8 weeks.
- To share a few of the successes we have seen during this brief time using telehealth with individuals at home:
 - *A client missed multiple appointments for peer support services. In reaching out to him to let him know we could provide this via telephone or using ZOOM, he decided to give it a try. He is now engaged in services!*
 - *A client who has benefited from using telehealth is an individual currently going through chemotherapy for cancer. Her medical regime leaves her very weak, with a compromised immune system. The client has a history of trauma, including sex trafficking, as well as substance abuse that she has worked on and wants to continue doing so. We know that physical illness, psychosocial stressors and fear of a recurrence of cancer can lead to increased symptoms and relapse without adequate support, therapy and care coordination. This client said she was "so happy" to engage in therapy via telehealth and utilize on-line tools and other resources in her own home to support her recovery.*
 - *The mother of a 13-year-old states, "Telehealth has made it easier to access services for my child because it saves times, doesn't require transportation, and provides the comfort of being in our own home which eases (my child's) anxiety. She added, "being in her own home and easing of her child's anxiety has reduced the number missed appointments."*
 - *A client who is a veteran with severe PTSD symptoms was able to utilize evidence-based tools and guided techniques via telehealth in order to reduce his level of distress, gain insight, and change his cognition to a more positive outlook, all while remaining in his own home.*

REQUEST FOR CONTINUATION OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES GOING FORWARD

TAMHO members will continue to provide services that best meet the needs and preferences of their clients, whether that is in person, via tele-video or telephonic. Based on the positive outcomes and client experiences that have been reported about telehealth services, we think telehealth is a valuable tool in the toolbox.

We request that TennCare require all payers to allow telehealth services, both televideo and telephonic, as options going forward. Additionally, we request that TennCare authorize reimbursement for direct to patient telehealth services.

