

Telehealth Opportunities for California



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Today too many patients in California's health care safety net face long wait times or travel long distances to see providers, especially specialists. The resulting delays in care can have serious consequences for their health.

" Sometimes I'd travel an hour and a half to two hours each way [to see a therapist]. A lot of the time I was stressed about getting there. If I had a ride coming, would it be on time? And the traffic, the expense of it. By the time I got to my therapist, I couldn't really concentrate on what I needed to be there for." ■ Debbie

Expanding telehealth is an opportunity for California to:

Increase Access to Health Care

Telehealth can increase access to health care providers, particularly in rural areas. By bringing care closer to patients, or into their homes, telehealth can make life-saving differences for patients who face the barriers of transportation, mobility or cost.

Improve Health Outcomes

Research supports the positive impact telehealth can have on health outcomes.

- Veterans Health Administration patients who faced travel burdens reaching specialized HIV treatment centers were able to effectively manage their treatment when they could access telehealth services near them.¹
- Post-operative bypass surgery patients experienced better general health functioning using remote patient monitoring than those without it.²
- Diabetics offered digital self-management, health education and social networking tools reported lower blood pressure and better health behaviors like healthy eating and physical activity.³

Telehealth brings a pediatric neurologist to the remote community of Redding via video, where primary care provider, Dr. Saini, facilitates appointments for Maurice, who was born with cerebral palsy. Dr. Saini says:

"If we did not have telemedicine neurology at our facility, I worry about missed appointments," since Maurice's specialist is a three-hour drive away. Maurice's grandmother and caregiver Bobbi says telemedicine is a "blessing" for her family. "Reece' is getting the same treatment that he would get if I took him to Sacramento."



Debbie of Anza, CA utilizes telehealth mental health services at Borrego Health in Riverside County.

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3. Carter, EL, Nunlee-Bland G, & Callender C. A Patient-Centric, Provider-Assisted Diabetes Telehealth Self-management Intervention for Urban Minorities. *Perspect Health Inf Manag.* 2011;8:1b. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3035826/>. Accessed October 18, 2019.

A UC Davis study analyzing 18 years of patient data found that telehealth helped patients avoid more than five million miles in travel and \$3 million in travel costs.

Bobbi takes her grandson Maurice to telehealth visits in Redding, CA. Maurice was born with cerebral palsy and experiences seizures.



Enable Cost-Effective Care

Telehealth is cost-effective for both patients and providers: that's why it is embraced by insurers and providers like Kaiser Permanente and the Veterans Health Administration. Commercial payers alone are estimated to have experienced a 56% increase in telehealth utilization from 2016 to 2017.⁴

Telehealth has been associated with cost-effectiveness in studies ranging from rural live video programs⁵, to e-consult programs in Medicaid⁶, to using multiple telehealth modalities to treat people with chronic conditions.⁷ The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has identified many examples of telehealth reducing costs or improving care without affecting cost. For example, a study of 11 nursing homes showed that using telehealth for physician coverage during off hours could reduce hospitalizations and generate an average savings to Medicare of \$151,000 per nursing home.⁸

CMS has detailed opportunities to reduce costs or improve care by implementing telehealth into Medicare services, with a focus on:

- Rural populations
- Urban populations
- Patients with end-stage renal disease
- Patients in long-term care facilities
- Patients with disabilities
- Patients with chronic disease
- Patients with mental health disorders
- Patients with substance abuse disorders, including opioids⁹

Deliver Care with High Patient Satisfaction

“ People care. That’s the main thing, is these people really care that I get better and they actually are giving me the help that I need. No, I don’t have money, but I can have the same kind of healthcare as everyone deserves.” ■ Jill

Studies going back as far as 2010 show that telehealth results in high patient satisfaction, as well as improved outcomes.¹⁰

- Ninety percent of geriatric patients using live video telehealth reported liking or preferring telehealth compared to face-to-face care.¹¹
- Obstetric patients who chose telehealth care report higher overall satisfaction compared to patients who chose traditional, in-person care.¹²
- Veterans Health Administration patients consistently rate satisfaction with telehealth services equivalent to in-person visits for the same type of service.¹³

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