

# COVID-19 TELEHEALTH ESSENTIALS

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth programs are more critical than ever before. Healthcare organizations are relying heavily on the power of telehealth to manage the needs and conditions of all consumers while preserving brick-and-mortar facilities for patients who need them most. Almost overnight the industry has shifted from viewing telehealth as a vehicle for convenience to recognizing it as an integral component of care delivery in high-risk and uncertain times.

**No matter how mature your organization's telehealth program is, we encourage you to take these three steps now:**

- Establish a point person who will oversee and coordinate all of the organization's responses to COVID-19.
- Set up a help desk. This can assist with triaging the most urgent cases and directing patients toward appropriate resources.
- Become familiar with the [recent expansion of telehealth access](#) from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which

removes financial and regulatory roadblocks, both for receiving and providing remote care. Track future changes closely as federal regulations continue to evolve.

Whether your organization is looking to implement new services or expand existing ones, there are core steps every healthcare organization can take to increase the power of their telehealth programs today while also laying the foundation to optimize telehealth after the pandemic subsides.

**If your organization has a robust telehealth program in place:**

- Repurpose successful tactics you've used during flu season, such as virtual screenings and help lines for evaluating symptoms.
- Maintain the telehealth services that have been most successful for patients in other circumstances.

**If your organization wants to improve its telehealth program:**

- Determine what your current capabilities are, where they need to be and how you can patch the gaps.
- Don't panic-buy more technology just to have more technology. Choose tools that will work for what your organization and your patients need.

## If your organization does not have a telehealth program in place:

- Develop a plan for utilizing common technologies such as FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts and others as soon as possible to treat patients virtually. The HHS has authorized the use of these tools during the pandemic.
- Solidify a strategy for converting back to processes and technologies that are compliant with health privacy laws after the pandemic has subsided.
- Regroup with key leaders in the organization to explore developing telehealth capabilities in the near future.
- Establish a point person who will oversee and coordinate all of the organization's responses to COVID-19.

In addition to optimizing what telehealth capabilities your organization has, be prepared to address tangential processes and requirements to ensure your strategies and tactics are successful.

## Move providers and specialty care to telehealth.

- Consider using virtual providers to operate your telehealth services. Since they will also work remotely, it can stop the spread of COVID-19 and free up in-house providers.
- Continuing to provide regular services virtually can help stem volume losses of regular office visits and other ambulatory services that are occurring during the crisis.

## Update information technology (IT) programs to support virtual work.

- Make sure your organization has the right licenses and bandwidth to sustain employees working remotely.

- Work with your IT experts to ensure the devices that are being used remotely have the highest standard of cybersecurity protections.
- If you have a help desk in place for your brick-and-mortar locations, consider establishing a separate help desk for your telehealth offerings. You can either enable the current help desk staff to support telehealth offerings or utilize your IT experts to operate a help desk for telehealth.

## Don't lose sight of best practices in the short term.

- Get patient consent to receive care via telehealth, as it is still required. Similar to how organizations track verbal orders from physicians, emphasize the importance of documenting both the patient's consent and your patient consent procedure.
- Communicate with payors regarding your increased use of telehealth services to avoid nonpayment issues. While the HHS eased its strict standards to enable faster and more effective care, keep in mind that some payors may not pay if certain services are not compliant with privacy laws.
- Protect health data and maintain a high level of cybersecurity.

Whether it's for containing a virus, treating the elderly at home or improving care access in rural communities, healthcare organizations will still see the future benefits of telehealth services from the investments they make now.

For more information, [contact us](#) or visit our [COVID-19 resources page](#).



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