



Telemedicine: Increased Access to Quality & Affordable Care

Telemedicine offers a personalized and convenient alternative to visiting an emergency room, urgent care center, or doctor's office for non-emergency medical needs. The use of telemedicine has already proven successful in increasing access to care, achieving cost-savings for consumers, and reducing the number of unnecessary hospitalizations. However, Texas lags behind other states in establishing a supportive regulatory environment for the expansion of telemedicine. In fact, over the last several years, the Texas Medical Board has moved to unnecessarily impose more stringent standards for telemedicine than in-person medical services. These regulations make it more difficult for qualified physicians to use telemedicine to provide care to more Texans. Telemedicine is a delivery model that offers great promise to help our state address the critical issues of health care quality, availability, and affordability. Health plans are looking for ways to expand, not limit, the use of telemedicine in Texas. We need to ensure that our state regulations are not standing in the way of innovation and not creating unnecessary, costly mandates that interfere with private market competition.

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Telemedicine allows us to achieve the goals of the 'triple aim:' enhanced patient care and a better patient experience in a more cost-effective manner.

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Natasa Sokolovich, JD, MSHCPM, executive director, Telemedicine at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

TAHP Supports Free-Market Solutions to Expand Telemedicine in Texas

TAHP opposes broad, overly restrictive regulations or contract and payment mandates that impose a one-size-fits-all approach to telemedicine and reduce private market competition. Telemedicine is a constantly evolving technology that is most effective when implemented in a tailored manner that meets individual regions, providers and patients' needs. TAHP supports free-market principles that allow the telemedicine industry to grow and become a more viable option for Texans to access quality, convenient and low-cost health care services for appropriate medical needs.

A one-size-fits-all telemedicine mandate is not the right fit for Texas:

- Telemedicine technology is constantly evolving, and flexibility is critical to allow for growth and changes to meet the varying needs of consumers and provide them with the greatest amount of options.
- A one-size-fits-all telemedicine mandate inhibits health plan efforts to provide the highest quality care. Not all telemedicine providers have been vetted or have contracted with health plans, ensuring that they meet stringent internal quality standards. Health plans should be allowed to provide services through the highest-quality and most affordable providers.
- Telemedicine should be made available to Texans without requiring an in-person visit, unless clinically recommended. A prior in-person visit is a layer of red tape not needed if it is determined that high-quality care can be maintained without it.
- Health plans should be allowed to tailor and incorporate the right type and scope of telemedicine technology based on regional, provider and patient needs.
- There are various types of telemedicine that can be used effectively at both authorized clinical sites as well as in non-clinical settings. Applying stringent location requirements may hamper the ability for telemedicine to meet patient needs throughout the State of Texas.
- Similar to traditional doctors' visits, a telemedicine patient may request additional prescription refills or submit a follow-up question to the provider after being seen. Just as these communications are considered routine services in traditional medicine, so should these be considered routine needs in telemedicine and not subject to separate reimbursement.

Why Telemedicine Makes Sense in Texas

Due to a number of factors, Texas is a strong market for telemedicine. Chief among them is access to care – a crucial problem in Texas, with the Texas Medical Association reporting there are about 186 physicians for every 100,000 residents. Telemedicine creates efficiencies that allow Texas-licensed physicians to expand their reach into every corner of our vast and diverse state.

New research by the Texas Association of Business (TAB) indicates Texans are eager to have greater access to telemedicine:

- **70%** of Texans favor the use of telemedicine to diagnose common medical conditions.
- **25%** of Texans have used an emergency room to treat such common conditions – a much more costly and time-consuming alternative to telemedicine.
- **51%** of Texans believe that access to health care providers has gotten more difficult.
- **24%** of rural Texans have to drive 30 minutes or more to get to the doctor's office.
- **23%** of Texans have to wait 14 or more days to see their doctor.

Telemedicine: Saves Time, Saves Money, Increases Access

For those with more simple, routine health care needs, telemedicine offers a valuable alternative that reduces the need for unnecessary follow-up visits or hospitalization, offers dramatically shorter wait times, and results in lower out-of-pocket costs for the consumer. Just as important, telemedicine offers a faster alternative for patients, many of whom cannot afford to miss work for a long doctor's appointment, are home with multiple children, or have to travel long distances to visit a doctor.

Telemedicine also opens the door to health care services to those who may otherwise go without care. As physician shortages grow across the country and especially in Texas, which has 425 designated Health Professional Shortage Areas, access to health care is becoming a chief concern.

Time-Saver

- Telemedicine eliminates nearly **1 in 5** ER visits
- **90%** of telemedicine visits require no additional care by a primary care physician
- To the contrary, **13%** of all traditional doctor's office visits and **20%** of all trips to the ER require a follow-up visit

Time-Saver

- Average wait time to get an in-person doctor's appointment: **20 days**
- Average wait time to get an in-person appointment with a specialist: **18 days**
- Average wait time in the doctor's office prior to being seen: **84 minutes**
- Average wait time to get a telemedicine visit: **2 minutes**

Cost-Saver

- Average cost of an ER visit: **\$2,168**
- Average cost of an urgent-care visit: **\$150**
- Average cost of first-time visit at traditional doctor: **\$82**
- Average cost of a telemedicine visit: **\$40**

Increases Access

Consider the figures for one large national provider of telemedicine services; many of the patients who used their services may have not otherwise seen a provider:

- **34%** of telemedicine visits occur on weekends and holidays
- More than **20%** of patients had not seen a health care provider in the prior year

