

WVAHP Supports Telehealth Reform to Protect West Virginia's At-Risk Communities

The West Virginia Association of Health Plans (WVAHP), made up of the managed care organizations that manage West Virginia's Medicaid Program, strongly supports legislative changes that would expand opportunities for telehealth programs within the state, including the repeal of in-state licensure regulations and in-person contact rules.

Current Laws Unnecessarily Prohibit Physician-Patient Relationships Established Through Telecommunication Means

- West Virginia Code §30-3-13a and §30-14-12d state that physician-patient relationships *may not* be established through audio-only or text-based communications.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way Americans interact with one another, especially in some specific communities. Unnecessary in-person visits to healthcare providers only serve to increase risks in vulnerable individuals. Additionally, our rural communities are already greatly impacted by a lack of proximity to local medical facilities even prior to the virus.
- While West Virginia allows for a physician-patient relationship to be established through video conferencing, many of our state's residents lack the broadband connectivity required for such connections.
- To prevent the spread of the coronavirus, West Virginia Executive Order 07-20 suspended the statutory requirement that the initial telehealth physician-patient relationship cannot be established by an "audio-only" means, such as telephone. We recommend a permanent codification of this portion of the executive order by removing this requirement from code.

Telehealth's Biggest Benefit Is Connecting Patients and Doctors at a Distance

- Requiring that a telehealth physician be licensed specifically in West Virginia is a hinderance to providing care to our state's residents.
- While demand for rural doctors is increasing, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that, in 2012, there were 53.3 physicians per 100,000 people in urban areas while there were only 39.8 per 100,000 people in rural areas.
- State Executive Order 07-20 has suspended the requirement that telemedicine providers be licensed in West Virginia, if the providers have a valid license from another state. We support making this change permanent to ensure West Virginians always have access to the healthcare they need. There is nothing that makes this solution viable only in the midst of a pandemic – it should be a permanent change.

Changes Will Provide an Increase in Access, and Affordability for West Virginians

- The COVID-19 pandemic will have a permanent effect on healthcare on a global scale. We should ensure that we are using this opportunity to bring our healthcare system and regulations up to date with the 21st century.
- The WVAHP strongly encourages the repeal of the telehealth regulations listed above to provide West Virginia patients with adequate care both during the coronavirus pandemic and moving forward into a post-COVID future.