Telehealth for Medications for Addiction Treatment (MAT)

Provider Resource

This information serves as a resource for policies and regulations, emerging best practices, and tools and resources to support delivery of medications for addiction treatment (MAT) via telehealth in California.

# On This Page

[On This Page 1](#_Toc99967318)

[Key Facts 2](#_Toc99967319)

[What is telehealth for MAT? 2](#_Toc99967320)

[What are the latest policies and regulations on telehealth for MAT? 2](#_Toc99967321)

[What are the best resources to stay up to date on policy changes? 3](#_Toc99967322)

[What are current advocacy initiatives to continue telehealth in California? 3](#_Toc99967323)

[Service Delivery 4](#_Toc99967324)

[What are key principles for providing telehealth for MAT? 4](#_Toc99967325)

[What are the benefits and challenges of telehealth for MAT? 4](#_Toc99967326)

[What do California providers report about providing telehealth for behavioral health needs? 5](#_Toc99967327)

[What guidance is available to learn more about best practices? 6](#_Toc99967328)

[Patient Education and Access 7](#_Toc99967329)

[How can I help my patients access telehealth for MAT? 7](#_Toc99967330)

[What tools and resources can help my patients learn more about telehealth for MAT? 7](#_Toc99967331)

[General Telehealth Resources 8](#_Toc99967332)

[References 8](#_Toc99967333)

# Key Facts

## What is telehealth for MAT?

In California, telehealth is defined as “The mode of delivering health care services and public health via **information and communication technologies** to facilitate the diagnosis, consultation, treatment, education, care management, and self-management of a patient’s health care while the patient is at the originating site and the health care provider is at a distant site.

“Telehealth facilitates patient self-management and caregiver support for patients and includes synchronous interactions and asynchronous store and forward transfers” (DHCS, 2021).

Medications for addiction treatment (MAT), sometimes referred to as medication-assisted treatment, refers to FDA-approved prescription drugs for substance use disorders (SUDs), including opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides a [comprehensive resource for MAT practitioners](https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment).

## What are the latest policies and regulations on telehealth for MAT?

### Federal

In January 2022, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services [(CMS) letter to providers](https://www.cms.gov/files/document/mm12549-cy2022-telehealth-update-medicare-physician-fee-schedule.pdf) updated the Telehealth Services List and provided other guidance around modifiers and fees.

The following bills have been introduced in the 117th Congress (2021–2022):

* Telehealth Expansion Act of 2021  
  [H.R. 5981](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/cphbClY9lnS2o0ri8_Cuh) (Rep. Steel R-CA)—This bill amends the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permanently extend the exemption for telehealth services from certain high-deductible health plan rules.
* Primary and Virtual Care Affordability Act  
  [H.R. 5541](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/FsGRCmZ9mofj5BxhgnjK8) (Rep. Schneider D-IL)—This bill extends until December 31, 2023, the exemption for telehealth services from certain high-deductible health plan rules. It also provides a high-deductible health plan safe harbor for the absence of a deductible for certain primary care services provided in any plan year beginning on or before December 31, 2023 (COVID-19 emergency period).
* Telemedicine Everywhere Lifting Everyone’s Healthcare Experience and Long Term Health HSA Act of 2021 or the TELEHEALTH HSA Act of 2021  
  [S. 2097](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/ZXwSCn590pH7GAEInhWLZ) (Sen. Kennedy R-LA)—This bill makes permanent the preferred treatment of telehealth and other remote care services for purposes of health savings accounts (HSAs).

### State of California

In February 2022, the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) published a policy paper proposing the implementation of broad changes that would continue to allow additional Medi-Cal covered benefits and services to be provided via telehealth when clinically appropriate and that are guided by the principles of equity, access, standard of care, patient choice, confidentiality, stewardship, and payment appropriateness. Some of the specific services and strategies included:

* Continue baseline coverage of synchronous telehealth
* Continue baseline coverage of asynchronous telehealth
* Continue payment parity
  + All county-administered behavioral health reimbursements will be cost based until behavioral health payment reform via California Advancing and​ Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) (anticipated July 2023).
* Continue coverage of brief virtual communications in physical health
  + Add coverage of virtual communications (specifically e-visits) to 1915 (c) Home and Community -Based Services (HCBS) Waivers, Targeted Case Management (TCM), and Local Educational Agency Medi-Cal Billing Option Program (LEA-BOP)
* Continue to reimburse Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) at Prospective Payment System (PPS) rate for otherwise billable visits delivered via telehealth
* Establish new patients via telehealth ([DHCS,](https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/DHCS-Telehealth-Policy-Paper-2-3-22.pdf) 2022)

## What are the best resources to stay up to date on policy changes?

The following resources are helpful for staying current on policy changes.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author | Description |
| [List of Telehealth Services | CMS](https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-General-Information/Telehealth/Telehealth-Codes) | CMS | Details telehealth services covered by CMS in 2022 |
| [Medi-Cal & Telehealth​​](https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/Telehealth.aspx) | DHCS | Comprehensive resource from DHCS on telehealth under Medi-Cal |
| [CCHP Home](https://www.cchpca.org/) | Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) | Website that explains relevant laws and regulations as well as their impact (sponsored by the National Telehealth Policy Resource Center) |
| [California Current State Laws and Policy](https://www.cchpca.org/california/) | CCHP | Focuses on California telehealth laws, with tabs for COVID-19, Medicaid, Private Payer, and Professional Requirements |
| [Telehealth FAQ- California Board of Psychology](https://www.psychology.ca.gov/laws_regs/telehealth_faq.shtml) | California Board of Psychology | Telehealth FAQs |
| [Telehealth Learning Series FAQs](https://telehealthlearning.org/telehealth/documents/TLS_FAQs_June2020.pdf) | Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Network | FAQ #3 provides guidance on HIPAA secure platforms and measures |

## What are current advocacy initiatives to continue telehealth in California?

As a provider, you can use your voice to advocate for continued coverage and support for telehealth. Current initiatives include:

* Advocate for legislation to continue reimbursement for all forms of telehealth
* Advocate for expanded access to broadband internet
* Create a grant program from the state general fund to help patients get affordable internet services and phones/laptops/tablets
* Support the purchase of provider telehealth equipment in healthcare facilities in March 2023 (support from the Behavioral Health Response and Rescue Project)
* Develop and fund workforce training and technical assistance

Stay up to date by connecting with the [American Telemedicine Association](https://www.americantelemed.org/).

# Service Delivery

## What are key principles for providing telehealth for MAT?

### Individual choice is critical.

* Patients must be offered their choice of service delivery mode: via telehealth or in-person care.
* Patients should retain the right to receive health care in person, with the understanding that there may be a future public health emergency or natural disaster that affects the availability of in-person care.
* The level of care provided via telehealth must meet the same evidence-based standards as in-person care.
* Providers must obtain informed consent to treat via telehealth.

### Different populations may have different needs.

Equity and access were the first two guiding principles laid out by the February 2022 DHCS policy paper. As a fundamental framework, equity focuses on addressing disparities in care to every enrollee, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, income, class, disability, immigration status, nationality, religious belief, language, or geographic location, while leveraging telehealth modalities expands access to adequate, culturally responsive, patient-centered, equitable, and convenient health care. The following links provide specific resources for three different populations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author | Description |
| [Policy Statement: Medication-Assisted Treatment of Adolescents With Opioid Use Disorders](https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/3/e20161893/52715/Medication-Assisted-Treatment-of-Adolescents-With) | American Academy of Pediatrics | Policy Statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics that addresses recommended treatment methods as well as issues with access and support (2016) |
| [HITEQ Center – Telehealth Strategies and Resources for Serving Patients with Limited English Proficiency](https://hiteqcenter.org/Resources/HITEQ-Resources/telehealth-strategies-and-resources-for-serving-patients-with-limited-english-proficiency) | Health Information Technology, Evaluation, and Quality (HITEQ) Center | Downloadable PDF outlining resources for serving patients with limited English proficiency |
| [Indian Health Services (IHS), Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) 638, Clinics (ind health) (ca.gov)](https://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/Publications/masters-MTP/Part2/indhealth.pdf) | IHS | Searchable document from IHS covering topics such as enrollment, services available, prescriptions, mental health visits, and telehealth |

## What are the benefits and challenges of telehealth for MAT?

As with most systems-change initiatives, telehealth comes with its benefits and its challenges**.** It is essential that recommending its use comes from an informed understanding of each patient’s needs and preferences. The following benefits and challenges were compiled from the [California Behavioral Health Planning Council 2020 Data Notebook](https://www.calbhbc.org/uploads/5/8/5/3/58536227/2020-dn-overview-report.pdf) and a survey of Hub and Spoke sites in California.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Benefits | Challenges |
| For Patients | * High levels of patient satisfaction and increased patient engagement * Increased access for consumers, particularly in rural areas or for consumers for whom transportation is an issue | * Lack of computer or mobile device * Lack of or inadequate internet service * Inability to afford internet service or mobile data plan * Lack of privacy in home |
| For Providers | * Benefits to staffing, including increased morale, retention, and access to out-of-county providers | * Consumer distrust of telehealth services * Need for more training for staff |
| For Both | * Flexibility * Reduced cancellations/improved appointment attendance | * Consumer distrust of telehealth services * Fewer in-person interactions * Need for alternatives to urine screening |

## What do California providers report about providing telehealth for behavioral health needs?

In April 2021, Advocates for Human Potential (AHP) conducted a survey of Hub and Spoke System sites on the use of telehealth for MAT.

### Summary of results

* Seventy sites out of 86 surveyed (81%) responded.
* Sixty-four sites (91%) are currently using telehealth to deliver services. One site stated they will soon be adopting telehealth.
* For those six remaining sites not providing telehealth, the barriers reported are the patient population’s lack of access to technology and internet connections, the sites’ lack of infrastructure (technology and internet connections), and the preference for in-person visits.
* The two sites that reported lack of access to technology and internet connections for both patients and providers were from the Capital and NorCal regions.
* No sites from SoCal reported this as a barrier, and all are providing some form of telehealth for their patients.
* Only one site from Bay Area/Midstate is not providing telehealth but reported “no barriers at this time.”

### Common telehealth services

The most common services provided via telehealth by behavioral health providers, according to the AHP survey, are detailed in the chart below.

### Common telehealth platforms

The most common types of telehealth platforms used by providers are listed below. In summary, 34% of sites use more than one platform, most commonly a video platform and telephone service, and seven sites are only using telephone for telehealth services. Of those, five are exclusively using telephone for individual counseling.

## What guidance is available to learn more about best practices?

Access to a range of tools, strategies, and best practices prepares providers to be more effective, flexible, and responsive in meeting patient needs. The following links can supplement your existing resources.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author | Description |
| [Telehealth for the Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders](https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/ebp/telehealth-treatment-serious-mental-illness-substance-use-disorders) | SAMHSA | Guidance for implementing evidence-based practices, examples of telehealth implementation in treatment programs, and resources for evaluation and quality improvement |
| [Telehealth for Opioid Use Disorder Toolkit](https://pcssnow.org/resource/telehealth-for-opioid-use-disorder-toolkit-guidance-to-support-high-quality-care/) | Providers Clinical Support System | Guidance, directives, and recommendations on drug monitoring and urine toxicology screening |
| [Tips for Using Videoconferencing to Deliver SUD Treatment and Recovery Services](https://attcnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-attc/tips-using-videoconferencing-deliver-sud-treatment-and-recovery) | Mountain Plains ATTC | Resources on using technology and videoconferencing when providing behavioral health services |
| [Telehealth-and-Technology-assisted-Services-Resource-Guide](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Telehealth-and-Technology-assisted-Services-Resource-Guide-3-November-2021.pdf?daf=375ateTbd56) | National Council for Mental Wellbeing | Recommendations, tools, and examples from the field to better implement telehealth and technology-assisted services |

# Patient Education and Access

## How can I help my patients access telehealth for MAT?

Some programs cover internet costs and offer discounts to buy devices. The following are two examples.

### Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program offers discounts on broadband internet service to eligible households. To learn more:

* Phone: (877) 384-2575
* Link: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

### California LifeLine

The California LifeLine program offers discounts on home or cell phone bills to eligible households. To learn more:

* Phone
  + 1-866-272-0349 (English)
  + 1-866-272-0350 (Spanish)
* Links
  + <https://www.californialifeline.com/en>
  + <https://www.californialifeline.com/es>

## What tools and resources can help my patients learn more about telehealth for MAT?

Patients may have several concerns about telehealth for MAT, ranging from privacy concerns to access. The “Can Telehealth for MAT Work for Me?” flier, embedded below, is available for download or printing. An educational video is coming soon!

An online FAQ is available here: [link to Telehealth for MAT Patient FAQ]

[embed flier]

### Educational resources and tools for patients

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author | Description |
| [Free Telehealth Resources for California Patients](https://www.caltrc.org/patients/) | [California Telehealth Resource Center](https://www.caltrc.org/patients/) | Patient- and family-focused information including an introductory video, educational materials, success stories, and links to other resources |
| [Telehealth: For patients](https://telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/) | U.S. Department of Health and Human Services | Links to further information and guidance on topics such as telehealth & COVID-19, getting help with access, preparing for a virtual visit, and telehealth and privacy for patients |
| [How to Start Buprenorphine or Naloxone at Home (Suboxone Induction)](https://www.careinnovations.org/wp-content/uploads/How-to-Start-Buprenorphine-naloxone-at-Home-Suboxone-Induction.pdf) | Care Innovations | Guidance and informational graphics for self-administering and regulating dosage and frequency of at-home induction |
| [To Keep Your Telehealth Visit Private](https://coephi.org/app/uploads/drupal_files/tips-individuals.pdf) | Center for Excellence for Protected Health Information | Tips on how to keep your telehealth visit private, including protecting your communications, preparing your surroundings, and protecting your devices such as a phone or laptop |
| [How to Prepare for a Video Appointment with Your Mental Health Clinician](https://smiadviser.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/How-to-Prepare-for-a-Video-Appointment.pdf?utm_source=Mailchimp&utm_medium=Email) | SMI Adviser (An American Psychiatric Association and SAMHSA initiative) | Guidance on how to prepare for a video appointment, including what to do the day before, the day of, and just before the appointment starts |

# General Telehealth Resources

The following resources cover general information on telehealth in California.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Author | Description |
| [Telehealth Definitions](https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/telehealthdefinitions.aspx) | DHCS | Key terms related to telehealth |
| [Telehealth Resources](https://www.caltrc.org/) | California Telehealth Resource Center | Resource center with tabs for tools and resources, events, and training and education |
| [California Telehealth Network](https://www.caltelehealth.org/) | California Telehealth Network | Information on technologies and services to improve access to high-quality health care for medically underserved and rural Californians |
| [Telehealth and Technology-assisted Services Resource Guide](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Telehealth-and-Technology-assisted-Services-Resource-Guide-3-November-2021.pdf?daf=375ateTbd56) | National Council for Mental Wellbeing | Recommendations, tools, and examples from the field to better implement telehealth and technology-assisted services |

# References

Advocates for Human Potential. (April 2021). *Summary of Telehealth Survey of Hub & Spoke System Sites.*

California Department of Health Care Services. (2021, February 2). *Post-COVID-19 public health emergency telehealth policy recommendations: Public document*. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/DHCS-Telehealth-Policy-Proposal-2-1-21.pdf>

California Department of Health Care Services. (2022, February 3). *Department of Health Care Services post-COVID-19 public health emergency telehealth policy recommendations*. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/DHCS-Telehealth-Policy-Paper-2-3-22.pdf>