

California Must Invest in Equal Access to Telehealth

Telehealth, Including Audio Visits, Improves Health Care Access and Equity

- Telehealth, the use of audio and video technology for health care, has become an integral part of California's public health care system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the public health emergency, **telehealth has represented 25% of all Planned Parenthood visits in the state, more than half of which are audio visits.**
- Through remote audio and video visits, patients have been able to continue receiving the timely information and care they need from Planned Parenthood's trusted providers. Audio visits, where patients are able to connect with their provider over the phone, have been essential in continuing access to care and decreasing pre-existing barriers to health care.
- According to the California Health Benefits Review Program (CHBRP), coverage of telephone visits reduces transportation barriers to in-person care and increases health care options for patients, which would result in "equivalent or better outcomes (compared with in-person care) because they would no longer delay or avoid in-person visits because of travel difficulties." [1]

Patients Prefer and Need Telehealth

- The California Pan-Ethnic Health Network reports high satisfaction with telehealth among diverse consumers [2] and a California Health Care Foundation [3] report found high satisfaction with telehealth visits among patients with low incomes; who found it easier to keep these appointments compared to in-person ones; and who indicated that they would always prefer the option of phone or video visits to continue beyond the pandemic.
- Telehealth can make a crucial difference for patients with transportation barriers, child care challenges, for people who live in rural communities and isolated, disadvantaged areas.

To Continue Reducing Disparities, the State Can't Cut Telehealth Rates Now

- More than 14 million Californians, or 36% of the state population, could face reduced access to telehealth if rates to Medi-Cal providers are cut in the state budget.
- Through telehealth, Planned Parenthood is meeting patients where they are and ensuring that care is accessible, no matter what. It is imperative that this option of care made available during the public health emergency does not go away post-pandemic. Planned Parenthood strongly supports the continuation of telehealth options for Medi-Cal patients and urges the state budget proposal to include the following:
 - Payment parity for video, audio, and in-person visits in Medi-Cal programs
 - Allow providers to provide audio visits to established and new patients
 - Remote enrollment in limited scope Medi-Cal programs, such as Family PACT, Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women, and Medi-Cal Minor Consent

Creating parity in telehealth access between Medi-Cal and commercial plans "would decrease income disparities in access to health care and health outcomes by reducing delays in in-person care for some conditions, as well as providing equal access to all modalities of care"

- California Health Benefits Review Program

[1] California Health Benefits Review Program. April 16, 2021. Analysis of California Assembly Bill 32 Telehealth. <http://analyses.chbrp.com/document/view.php?id=1553>

[2] California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. February 9, 2021. What Can We Learn From the Rapid Adoption of Telehealth? https://cpehn.org/assets/uploads/2021/02/Health-Care-Adoption-in-the-Face-of-a-Global-Pandemic-Slides_Compiled.pdf

[3] California Health Care Foundation. October 8, 2020. Listening to Californians with Low Incomes. <https://www.chcf.org/publication/listening-californians-low-incomes/>