NORTH Dakota | Behavioral Health
Be Legendary.™ HUMAN SERVICES

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Using Telebehavioral Health during the COVID-19 pandemic

This guidance does not supersede requirements from professional licensing boards. Please check with your licensing board for requirements regarding utilizing telebehavioral health.

During this national emergency, utilizing telehealth is more important than ever to promote the practice of social distancing to reduce spread of COVID-19 while staying connected to individuals in need of service.

Overview of Telebehavioral Health. Telebehavioral health, telehealth, telemedicine, and related terms generally refer to the use of electronic communication and information technologies to provide individuals with real-time services from a distance.

Reimbursement utilizing Telebehavioral Health. Telebehavioral services are covered services under the North Dakota Substance Use Disorder Voucher and Medicaid, please see the Medicaid guidance for details on covered services.

Confidentiality. The United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has released information stating they will not impose penalties for noncompliance with HIPAA Rules during the nationwide public health emergency. For further information, visit their website.

Under this Notice, however, Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, and similar video communication applications that are public facing, should not be used in the provision of telehealth by covered health care providers.

Telebehavioral Health Formats. The list below includes some vendors that represent they provide HIPAA-compliant telebehavioral health formats (these options are not endorsed by OCR or the North Dakota Department of Human Services)

- Clocktree Systems Inc.
- Skype for Business / Microsoft Teams
- Updox
- VSee
- Zoom for Healthcare
- Doxy.me
- Google G Suite Hangouts Meet
- Cisco Webex Meetings / Webex Teams
- Amazon Chime
- GoToMeeting

TIPs for Utilizing Telebehavioral Health

1. **Be strategic in your considerations:** Work with your team to think strategically about where opportunities for expanding telehealth are. Consider which services/programs already have virtual options that could be expanded, which populations or clients would most easily adapt to virtual platforms, and which services or populations would pose the greatest challenges. With things moving quickly, all of these factors are important to streamlining implementation.

2. **Communicate visit changes to your patients:** Let your patients know that your organization's telehealth policies during COVID19 outbreak. If you will only be providing telehealth visits, post information to your website, consider changing your organizations phone script to include this information at the beginning of your recording, call patients with upcoming appointments and offer televisit. Consider targeted outreach to "high risk" patients.

3. **Practice using technology first:** Whatever application you decide to use, practice with other staff before you use with a patient. You may be able to recommend preferred video conferencing applications to patients and send them test links to make sure a connection is available before starting your session.

4. **Documentation and record keeping:** Continue maintaining an electronic record for each patient and document to the highest of your capability based on your interaction, including any assessments or treatment plans. Ensure your staff are kept abreast of policy or billing changes as states adopt and expand access so that documentation is in compliance.

5. **Check in with patients:** find out where the trouble areas are for them and make changes where necessary. Check in during the visit and afterwards. Did they struggle with this type of communication? Could you switch to a different application? Are there tests you could do beforehand to check their internet or phone connection if that is a trouble area?

6. **Reach out if you need help:** Training & Technical Assistance is available through SAMHSA, Telebehavioral Health Institute and Great Plains Telehealth Resource & Assistance Center.

Please continue to check the North Dakota Department of Human Services Webpage for continual updates and resources related to COVID-19. If you have any questions regarding this information, please feel free to call 701-328-8920 or e-mail dhsbhd@nd.gov.

Additional Resources:
*   National Council: Best Practices for Telehealth During COVID-19 Public Health Emergency
*   SAMHSA: Telebehavioral Health Training & Technical Assistance
*   DEA: Use of Telemedicine While Providing Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)