

EXPANDING ACCESS TO CARE THROUGH TELEHEALTH DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) strongly supports the use of innovative technologies, including telehealth, to expand consumer access to care when and where they need it. Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) companies are leading the effort to realize the promise of telehealth to improve health care access, reduce costs and promote positive health outcomes.

KEY FACTS



SINCE MARCH 2020, BCBS COMPANIES have [expanded access and coverage for telehealth](#).

To date, BCBS companies have **COLLECTIVELY COMMITTED OVER \$7 BILLION TO FIGHT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

BCBSA RECOMMENDS

As policymakers consider new laws and regulations around telehealth, BCBSA recommends a thoughtful approach to permanent telehealth expansion with a focus on flexibility in coverage to provide the care needs of each community, while enhancing trust and consumer protection against fraud and abuse through HIPAA-aligned privacy protections. To achieve these goals, we recommend that policymakers incorporate the following set of principles as a guiding framework:

1. ENSURE ACCESS AND EFFICIENCY

Improved access to care for patients and increased efficiency for providers and health plans should be underlying goals of all telehealth policies. Plans should be empowered — not mandated — to use technologies like telehealth to expand access to their members. We support efforts by state and federal agencies to remove arbitrary restrictions that dictate how, when and where a provider can treat patients, including geographic and originating site requirements which are not evidence-based or have no impact on quality of care. We also support increased investment in broadband and telehealth infrastructure to connect rural and underserved communities.

2. PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY

Telehealth and other health care policies should strive for maximum flexibility and cost efficiency and, therefore, should not impose coverage or payment mandates. While some health plans have provided payment at parity with in-person visits during the COVID-19 emergency to support health care providers, we should leverage technology to drive cost efficiencies (i.e., less overhead for office space, staff, time, etc.) once the public health emergency is lifted. Competition to provide better quality and more efficient care through the use of telehealth should be encouraged to help reduce costs.

3. MAKE CONSUMER PROTECTION AND TRUST PARAMOUNT

Consumer protection must be paramount to enhance quality and patient safety while expanding telehealth. The regulatory framework for telehealth must assure HIPAA-aligned privacy protections and provide guardrails against fraud and abuse. This will facilitate trust and open communications between the provider and the patient receiving care.