

Telehealth for mental health providers: A guide to providing effective virtual care



Introduction

Telehealth has become a staple in contemporary healthcare — especially in mental health settings. Whether it's on a video or phone call, secure messaging platform, or healthcare app, clients want virtual access to their providers.

How did we get here? Remote care has been around for decades, but more recent events have accelerated telehealth adoption. First with the proliferation of smartphones and apps in the early 2000s, then the Affordable Care Act in 2010, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Fast-forward to today, many mental healthcare providers are at a crossroads. Some believe firmly in the traditional, in-person therapy model; others see telehealth as the way forward to expand their reach and grow their practice. Still others have opted for a hybrid care model, which blends in-person therapy with telehealth sessions.

At Headway, our goal is to support providers on their telehealth journey by offering affordable, streamlined solutions — without sacrificing quality, security, or autonomy. So whether you've just launched a virtual therapy practice, or you're exploring the possibility of expanding your practice with telehealth, we have you covered.

In this guide, you'll learn the benefits of telehealth, including how it can make life easier for providers and clients alike; the challenges providers face when offering telehealth; as well as the cost of not offering telehealth and how it impacts your clients and your practice.

We also offer a quick overview of what to look for in a telehealth platform, so you can rest assured you're making the right choice in selecting a solution.

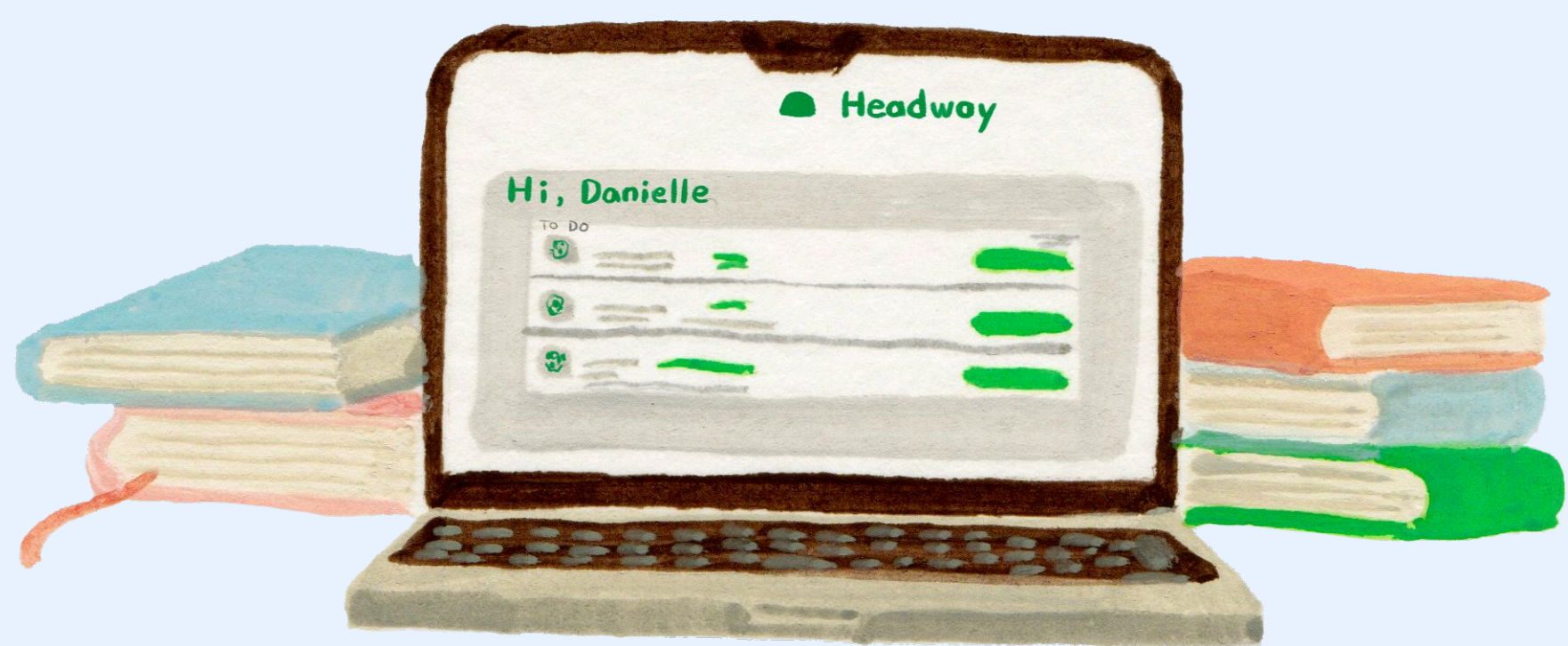
[Let's get started.](#)



¹ Source: NIH

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Key benefits of offering telehealth to clients

First, let's take a look at what you and your clients can gain from telehealth care.



1. You can increase client access to care

As a therapist, providing care is at the heart of what you do. And by offering telehealth, you greatly increase who you can provide care to.

Underserved communities, in particular, benefit from access to telehealth. Folks based in distant areas, clients without reliable transportation, or those in need of a specialist can connect with a wider range of providers thanks to telehealth.

Offering telehealth also improves continuity of care. Some clients face mobility challenges; others travel for work often. Still others move away — even if it's just across town or to another city within your state. Because of telehealth, you can continue seeing these clients without interruption.

"When regulations were relaxed around telehealth, I saw a dramatic increase in clients from underserved communities attending sessions. I was even able to do sessions with people who were in the hospital or skilled nursing facilities who would have otherwise fallen through the cracks."

Caitlin Pugh, LCSW,
and Headway provider

2. You introduce more flexibility and lower barriers to continued care

Telehealth offers a flexibility that in-person therapy can't. Clients can more easily fit therapy into their busy lives, attending sessions from the comfort of their home or office. Telehealth appointments also reduce barriers to attendance: eliminating commute time, time off work, or childcare logistics — reducing no-show and cancellation rates in the process.

Some clients also report feeling more comfortable with a virtual setting versus an in-person one. This can help with client engagement and retention — something we get into more a bit further down.

"I was more relaxed being at home. I did not have to travel, wait in a clinic, or manage parking. I could just walk into the session."

Telehealth client,
source: [ScienceDirect](#)

3. You can optimize your schedule

Thanks to telehealth, you can experience both less downtime between sessions and more flexibility in structuring your day. This allows you more control over the clients you work with, and more freedom in how you spend your **you** time.

PRO TIP FOR PROVIDERS

If you're practicing therapy out of your home, it can be tough to transition from seeing clients all day to engaging with the demands of your own life. Our advice? Give yourself a 30-minute reset after your last telehealth client of the day to help yourself transition from work to your personal life.

[Learn more](#)

4. You can reduce costs

Let's talk savings. While telehealth does take some upfront investment if you need to buy hardware, and ongoing expenses like Wi-Fi, you also save by not going into an office every day. For instance, if you choose to transition your practice entirely to telehealth, you can save costs by foregoing a physical office space, utilities, or front-desk staff. You're also saving on your daily commute. Whether you drive or take public transit, it all adds up.

"We decided to offer telehealth to meet the needs of our clients who overwhelmingly requested virtual sessions. In doing so, we also support our practice's mission of offering accessible, quality, and affordable care."

Kira Torre, LMFT, Chief Clinical Officer at Ever After Individual & Family Therapy, and Headway provider

5. You can enhance client engagement and retention

As we mentioned earlier, many clients express higher satisfaction when accessing care from a virtual setting. They appreciate the convenience and accessibility of telehealth — and how they can seamlessly integrate it into their lives.

In turn, client satisfaction boosts both engagement and retention — two important factors providers must consider for the sustainability of their practice.

6. You can support clinical outcomes

For many clients, virtual therapy can be just as effective as in-person sessions. This is especially true for those with conditions that might interfere with their ability to meet in person, such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD. In fact, some evidence-based protocols have been developed or adopted for telehealth.

As a provider, you might also have the opportunity to gain more insights into client environments. Seeing clients in their own space can provide additional context for treatment planning.

"In a virtual environment, I can see a client's world. I can gain more context clues about their life at home. A client with depression might tell me they've been cleaning up and taking better care of themselves. I can more acutely infer, by their surroundings, if that's materializing."

Jake Ross, Headway provider, MSW, LISW-S, LCSW

7. You can expand your reach and foster practice growth

Last but not least, offering telehealth helps you grow your client base. Whether it's new cities or new states (if you're licensed in multiple states), you can reach clients across a wider geographic region with telehealth. You can also offer care to folks who need a specialist, but one isn't available in their city or state. In turn, this will help you grow and sustain your practice.

You're also showing your adaptability to evolving client expectations — a tactic that strengthens your reputation as a provider folks can relate to.

EXPERT RESOURCES — AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Looking for more support growing your practice? Check out our guides to starting a therapy private practice and starting a psychiatry private practice. They're packed with tips for marketing your practice, growing your network, and much more.

How to manage risks and common challenges when offering telehealth

Despite the many benefits, we understand that you might be on the fence about telehealth. Or that getting started might feel daunting. Like launching your own private practice, there are unknown challenges — and that feeling of uncertainty can be overwhelming.

We’re here to help illuminate those challenges and arm you with the right resources to mitigate potential risks. Then, you can face these challenges head on and make informed decisions for your practice.

Here are those considerations to navigate through:



1. Affording telehealth-related costs

Just as you’ve invested in obtaining your license and complying with continuing education requirements, you likewise have to invest in your practice if you want to offer telehealth.

Keep in mind that your clients will also need to access — or invest in — reliable internet and modern technology to meet with you. And if they’re not able to afford Wi-Fi, for example, they may look to you to help troubleshoot a plan B.

HOW MUCH DOES OFFERING TELEHEALTH COST PROVIDERS?

Telehealth platform:
\$35-50/month

High-speed internet:
\$70-80/month

Hot spot:
\$30-\$100 per device

Data plans:
\$10-\$100+/month

Other hardware: variable

So what does that look like? Common expenses include:

A HIPAA-compliant telehealth platform subscription:

For example, Zoom for Healthcare is \$16.99/month per provider. If you operate a small group practice, you’d multiply that cost per provider. Alternatively, Doxy.me offers a free “lite” version of their telehealth platform for solo practitioners, but then the cost jumps to \$35/month for Pro features. For small group practices, they charge \$50/month per provider. Headway offers a secure telehealth platform built with HIPAA-compliance in mind, available at no cost for Headway providers. [\(Learn more here\)](#)

Additional fees: Keep in mind that some telehealth platforms charge extra for setup, integration with EHRs, higher support levels, or custom development. These added fees may push the total cost significantly above the base subscription.

High-speed internet: As we’ll cover in the next section, a reliable and stable internet connection is key to a sustainable telehealth practice. Many providers invest in the highest level of bandwidth to ensure they can get and stay connected during their sessions.

Hardware: If you’re just starting out with telehealth, you may need to buy all the equipment you need to launch your practice. This could include: a laptop or tablet with a high-quality camera, headphones, and/or back-up devices, such as a hot spot for your phone. If you offer audio-only telehealth, you might also need a landline or internet-based phone service.

2. Navigating technical issues

Speaking of troubleshooting, providers also have to manage the technical side of telehealth. For some providers, that means getting up to speed on using video conferencing platforms (like Zoom for Healthcare). For others, it means playing tech support for your clients.

The most common challenge is an internet connection. As we mentioned above, many providers invest in high-speed internet and the latest tech to overcome this. But hiccups happen — and that's why it's helpful to have a back-up plan (e.g., device) available so you can deliver the level and consistency of care your clients deserve.

There's also the client side of things: some might find it difficult to find a steady connection for the duration of their session. And if you're not the most tech-savvy person, you might have difficulty talking them through how to restart their router or download Zoom.

PRO TIP FOR PROVIDERS

Want to help prepare a client for their first telehealth session? First, set expectations: explain how telehealth works, the platform you're using, and what they'll need to connect (e.g., a laptop or phone). If there are any specific instructions for accessing the telehealth platform, be sure to send those to your client ahead of time. You could also offer to do a quick test run to get them comfortable with the technology.

[Learn more](#)

3. Ensuring security and privacy

A third obstacle providers face in launching a virtual practice is security.

If you're going to offer telehealth, you must use a secure, HIPAA-compliant telehealth tool. If you don't, you run the risk of HIPAA violations if client protected health information (PHI) is exposed or transmitted without safeguards. This can lead to significant legal and financial implications.

A related concern is privacy. Most providers have control over where they conduct their sessions. Whether you primarily work from home or in a clinical office setting, ensure that you have the privacy you need to provide care for your clients.

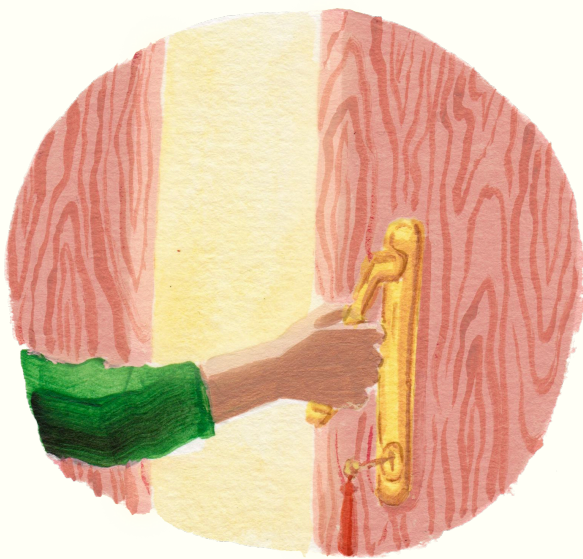
On the other hand, some clients might struggle with finding a private place for their sessions. Keep this in mind as you prepare to launch your telehealth practice, and be prepared to offer suggestions. For some clients, reserving a private room in a library might work. For others, they might need to drive to the parking lot of a coffee shop (that offers free Wi-Fi) to ensure privacy for their session. And if clients don't have privacy — and try to do therapy while driving or in public — be prepared to establish and communicate your policies and boundaries around that.

PRO TIP FOR PROVIDERS

Can't secure a private space for your sessions? If you're starting your own private practice, or just need a space for a limited number of hours each week, consider reserving private, HIPAA-compliant therapy rooms. [US Therapy Rooms](#) are a great option. You can often rent them by the hour, so you only pay for the time you need.

Calculating the risks of not using telehealth

We’ve weighed the challenges and benefits of offering telehealth as a mental health care provider. However, if you’re still on the fence, let’s talk about some of the risks of not incorporating telehealth into your practice (even as a hybrid model):



1. You might alienate your client population

In-person therapy works well for a variety of people. But, there’s an even greater number of folks who would also benefit from your care, but can’t attend in-person sessions for one reason or another.

Our advice? Consider the clients you work with today — or want to work with in the future — and what their limitations might be. Then, consider how telehealth could alleviate those obstacles and open up access to your care.

REQUIRING CLIENTS TO COME TO AN OFFICE FOR IN-PERSON THERAPY CAN BE RESTRICTIVE FOR

Parents with young children

People who travel for work often

Folks with disabilities or neurodivergencies

Those who live or work far from your office

Individuals who can’t drive (or can’t afford to drive) to you

Folks who need a specialist, but one isn’t available in their city or state

2. You limit your practice’s growth

In addition to alienating clients, you also shrink your service area — and thus, limit your practice’s growth — by not offering telehealth.

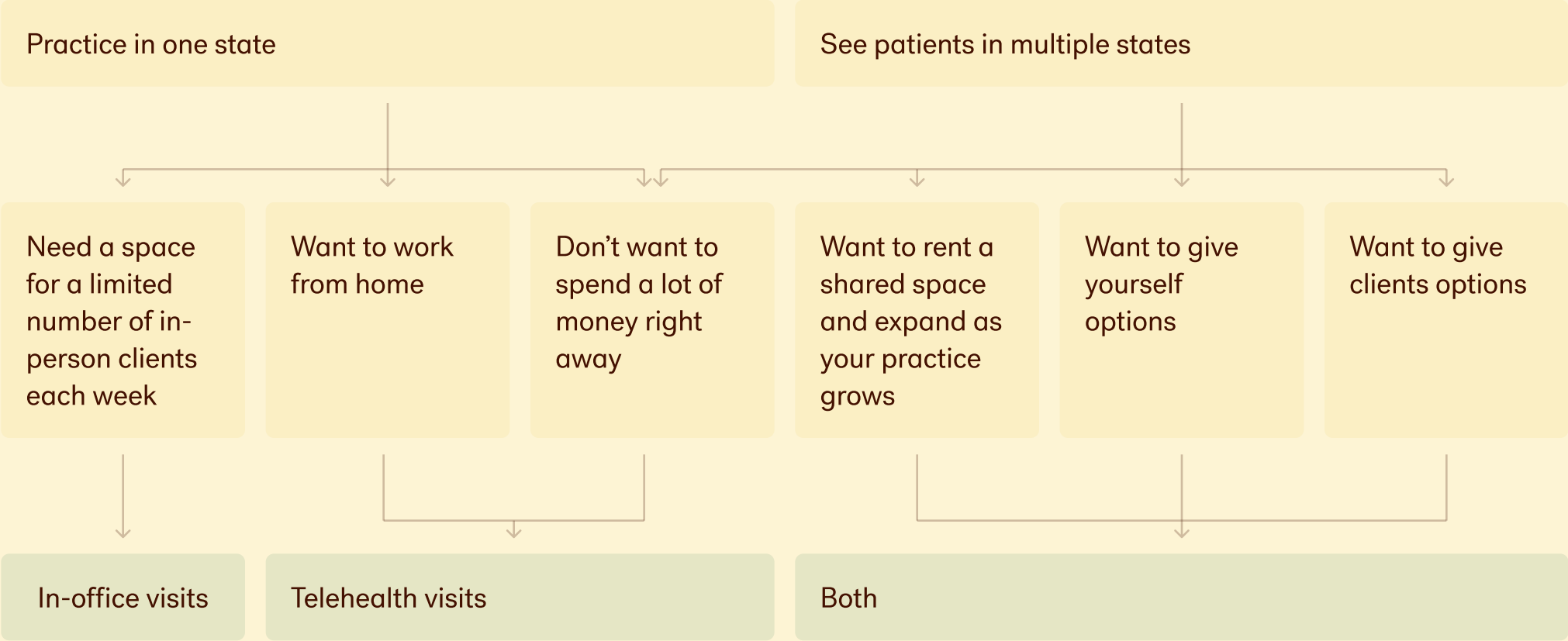
Consider this: providers who offer telehealth can offer their services to a wider radius than those who are willing to commute to an office. For providers who are licensed in one state, that means working with folks who might live hours away from you. And for those who are licensed in multiple states, your scope broadens even further.

Then, think about the clients you already work with. For example, as clients improve, they sometimes want to invest less in therapy. Telehealth offers an option to keep the relationship going, but in a less time-intensive way.

The same goes for reducing one-off cancellations. A client doesn’t have childcare? They can still meet with you virtually. A client’s traveling to another city in the same state? Once again, they can still meet with you. **Even if you don’t primarily practice virtually, a telehealth tool offers added flexibility whenever clients can’t meet in person.**

Still unsure how not offering telehealth limits your practice growth? Consider the below chart and identify the path you see your practice taking.

Seeing clients:
In-office, telehealth, or both?



3. You aren't future-proofing your business

If COVID-19 taught us anything, it was to prepare for the unknown. Forward-thinking providers have taken that lesson to heart, planning for the contingencies that could disrupt their care.

Those who continue to practice without telehealth are more vulnerable to interruptions during events like natural disasters, local shutdowns, and yes, pandemics. If there's a crisis, clients may go without the support they need. Offering telehealth — even as a one-off option — supports continuity of care.

This list is by no means exhaustive. But it demonstrates some of the obstacles your clients could face in getting care if you don't offer telehealth as an option.

PRO TIP FOR PROVIDERS

If you prescribe controlled substances, you may **need** a physical office space to see clients at least once a year. In some states, you will need to see them more than that.

Provider checklist: What to look for in a telehealth platform



Choosing a reliable telehealth platform should be an easy and straightforward process — but we know that’s not always the case for providers.

WE’VE ROUNDED UP THE TOP FEATURES A TELEHEALTH PLATFORM MUST HAVE:

- ☐ **HIPAA compliance and security:** Choose a platform with strong encryption, secure data storage, and privacy protections to safeguard client information.
- ☐ **Stress-free setup and ease of use:** Don’t get bogged down playing tech support. Choose a platform with an intuitive interface for both you and your clients that requires minimal setup or tech expertise.
- ☐ **Video and audio quality:** You want reliable, high-quality streaming that supports sensitive conversations without glitches or lags.
- ☐ **Scheduling and reminders:** Look for built-in calendar management, appointment booking, and automated reminders to reduce no-shows.
- ☐ **EHR and EMR integration:** This enables seamless connection with existing health records for streamlined documentation and continuity of care.
- ☐ **Customizable intake and consent forms:** Streamline the process of gathering client history, consent, and assessments electronically.

WE’VE ALSO INCLUDED FEATURES THAT AREN’T REQUIRED, BUT ARE STILL NICE TO HAVE:

- ☐ **Clinical workflow support:** Look for tools for note-taking, treatment planning, billing, and progress tracking within sessions. If you’re using AI-powered notes templates, make sure they’re built with insurance and legal compliance in mind.
- ☐ **Group sessions capability:** This enables providers to host multiple participants securely in the same session.
- ☐ **Insurance and billing support:** Integration with insurance claims, copay collection, and flexible payment options will reduce admin and make running your practice easier.
- ☐ **Multi-device accessibility:** Look for compatibility with desktop, tablet, and mobile devices so clients can join easily from anywhere.
- ☐ **Client engagement tools:** Look for a platform that enables privacy-protected messaging, homework assignments, or resource sharing between sessions.
- ☐ **Scalability and reliability:** As you grow your practice, you want the ability to handle a growing caseload and guarantee uptime during peak usage.

Get started with Headway Telehealth

Headway Telehealth is our secure, HIPAA-compliant video platform designed to connect providers and clients seamlessly for virtual appointments. It requires no client logins, software downloads, or complicated setup. Best of all, it’s free to Headway providers.

[Learn more](#)



FAQs

Do I need special billing codes for telehealth

While you'll likely use the same CPT codes as you would for an in-person appointment, there are a few distinctions in how to bill insurance for telehealth appointments. For example, you'll need to provide additional details to insurance payers in your claim, such as a place of service (POS code) along with a modifier add-on code for telehealth appointments.

Headway makes this process easy for providers by adding the POS to the claim ahead of time, so the only thing you need to do is document where the visit took place. Headway also reviews the payer documentation guidelines so our therapy templates have all of the required components.

[Learn more about billing for telehealth.](#)

How do I document telehealth visits to stay compliant?

You would document the same details as in-person sessions (e.g., client name, date of service, and session length), but also add telehealth-specific commentary, such as platform or technology used, the client's consent to telehealth, the client's location (for licensure compliance), your location, as well as any technical issues that affected care. Some insurers and boards also require additional telehealth documentation, including start and stop times.

[Learn more about meeting documentation standards and Headway's AI-assisted notes.](#)

Can I see clients across state lines?

Yes, if you're licensed in multiple states. And if you are, offering telehealth is a great way to expand your reach to even more clients. Plus, Headway makes it easy for providers who are licensed in multiple states to apply to be credentialed with every available plan in all states they are licensed in.

[Learn more about multi-state credentialing with Headway.](#)

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to streamline their practice and expand their network.

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with free, built-in EHR features
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with the top plans nationwide
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