

UPDATED INFO

See yellow highlights for updated content from previous published version.

Implementing Virtual and Telehealth Services

Background

To help providers implement new virtual and telehealth programming, CMS released on March 23, 2020 two comprehensive toolkits on telehealth that are specific to general practitioners, as well as providers treating patients with End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). (See new [telehealth expansion](#) section.)

According to the CMS bulletin, each toolkit contains electronic links to reliable sources of information on telehealth and telemedicine, which will reduce the amount of time providers spend searching for answers and increase their time with patients. Many of these links will help providers learn about the general concept of telehealth, choose telemedicine vendors, initiate a telemedicine program, monitor patients remotely and develop documentation tools. Additionally, the information contained within each toolkit will also outline temporary virtual services that could be used to treat patients during this specific period of time.¹

These two tool kits can be accessed at:

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/general-telemedicine-toolkit.pdf>

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/esrd-provider-telehealth-telemedicine-toolkit.pdf>

CMS maintains a Telehealth web page that includes several tools to help providers implement these services as well. The page can be accessed at: <https://www.healthit.gov/topic/health-it-initiatives/telemedicine-and-telehealth>.

Some of the resources available at this site include:

- ✓ The Federal Telehealth Compendium, which contains telehealth activities and resources available across the federal arena.
- ✓ Designing The Consumer-Centered Telehealth & eVisit Experience: Considerations for the Future of Consumer Healthcare
- ✓ Health IT Playbook: Telehealth
- ✓ The Telehealth Start-Up and Resource Guide, which provides a background and introduction to telehealth and telemedicine concepts, benefits, and resources.

Guidance

1. Identify areas within the health system that currently do not have virtual and/or telehealth services and would be able to serve patients more safely and effectively if implemented.
2. Review all applicable guidelines including current waivers to ensure services are implemented appropriately.
3. In addition to waivers designed to improve access during the COVID-19 emergency, be certain to note limitations that are being enforced to protect patient privacy.
4. Identify and make available appropriate equipment.
5. Implement charges for each service available.
6. Educate providers and staff to ensure:
 - a. Identification of payers that allow virtual and telehealth services
 - b. Services available are correctly identified and billed
 - c. Appropriate documentation is maintained
 - d. That emergency specific waivers are only implemented and maintained during this period
 - e. Educate patients



Sources

1. <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Current-Emergencies/Current-Emergencies-page> ■