A Framework for Implementing Telehealth
Rapid Changes in Telehealth Coverage

In order to enable health care providers to care for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, sweeping changes resulted in expansion in telehealth access, eligible services, and technology solutions. Design and use of these solutions continues to evolve. Volume of care through telehealth grew exponentially as the pandemic worsened, with the onset of stay-at-home orders and cancelling of non-emergent in-person services.

Providers with established telehealth programs leveraged these capabilities to transition from in-person to telehealth interactions. Other providers sought options that would allow them to facilitate virtual visits for the first time. When the public health emergency (PHE) period comes to an end, focus will shift to rebalancing the use of telehealth and digital services with in-person care. Work will need to continue to determine how best to integrate telehealth and digital health as core components of care delivery.

Regulatory flexibilities during the COVID-19 PHE have permitted the use of non-HIPAA-secured platforms for virtual visits, including the use of apps such as FaceTime and Skype. While this flexibility greatly expanded consumer access to care, these platforms facilitate telehealth at the most basic levels and fail to feature many useful capabilities of more secure, advanced platforms, including the ability to integrate information from patient interactions into electronic health records (EHR) and billing systems. Additionally, providers and technology vendors must assess how best to incorporate benefit eligibility verification, co-pay requirements, and remittance within a telehealth platform.

Goals of a Telehealth Program

Providers need to determine which telehealth capabilities are right for their practice and patients by defining the population(s) with whom they can be most successful when delivering care virtually.

- Set the clinical need and build the business case
- Identify current readiness, resources, and gaps
- Define effects on process, workflow, staff, and revenue
- Assess level(s) of care, data integration, and patient engagement required through implementation

Telehealth Program Implementation Considerations

Technology Needs
Including synchronous, live two-way audio-video or audio only, remote care management, asynchronous store-and-forward.

Resources and Roles
Process, workflow, staffing and throughput, implications in balancing in-person, telehealth and digital care across providers, care managers, information technology (IT) and technical

Platform Capabilities
Ability to include other caregivers in the visit, share information across the clinical and personal care team(s), integrate visit documentation and data into the electronic health record.

Virtual Branding
Patient access, immediacy, and convenience. Engagement, loyalty, and behavior changes in accessing care.

Maturity
Create a roadmap for seamless care integration that includes in-person, telehealth, and digital health. The pathway for success should foster building care team(s') confidence with the technology, identify practice opportunities, and strategies for overall growth.

Practice Readiness

Providers should determine how to incorporate telehealth into their care delivery in a manner that maximizes benefits for patients and their practice. This includes identifying the types of care to be delivered, how it will be delivered, the practice's clinical needs, and the goals of the telehealth program.

Telehealth options include:

Acute care:
Patient-initiated, on-demand evaluation of an acute condition. Focus is on convenience for patients, evaluating and treating some conditions, and directing care to the most appropriate site of service, when needed.

Chronic care management:
Provider-initiated visits that focus on continuity of care, care management, follow-up, and symptom tracking.

Behavioral health and substance use disorder:
Increases access to behavioral health services, addresses provider shortages, and allows for treatment from the patient's home.

Value-based care:
Meeting clinical and financial goals by improving patient outcomes through increased care management using virtual tools.

High-risk patients:
Addressing complex needs by combining virtual and in-person services to improve care continuity. Ability to target patients with rising levels of risk to mitigate avoidable exacerbations and services.

> **Telehealth connects patients and providers to serve a variety of care needs without having to travel to a provider's office.**

Benefits of Telehealth Services

Access, Convenience, and Immediacy

Engaging with Patients to Enhance Outcomes, Quality, Costs of Care, and Satisfaction

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