

# Adopting telehealth in your physician practice? Follow this playbook

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Telemedicine is critical to keeping physicians and patients safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and the technology ensures that Americans—including more than 100 million people with chronic conditions—continue to receive uninterrupted care without physically sitting in a waiting or exam room.

The AMA strongly encourages physicians to adopt telemedicine to support these goals and the Association has just released the Telehealth Implementation Playbook to walk physicians through a 12-step process to implement real-time audio and visual visits between a clinician and a patient.

The guide is part of the AMA's Digital Health Implementation Playbook series, which offers 12-step processes to guide physicians in implementing various digital health solutions. For example, another playbook in the series explains how to implement remote patient monitoring (RPM) so physicians can have patients use devices, trackers and sensors to capture health data outside of the clinical environment.

“For medical practices and health systems looking to integrate telemedicine as quickly as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, the playbook series not only offers a clear and efficient path to scaled implementation, but also access to institutional knowledge and best practices curated from experts in the field,” said AMA Chair Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH. “The AMA is committed to making technology an asset, not a time-consuming burden, and the playbook’s roadmap offers a proven course to telemedicine implementation when physicians need it most.”

## The warmup

The guide’s first section helps physicians understand what telehealth is and how it’s impacting the health care world. It also explains how the playbook works and outlines some key aspects of telehealth in practice, including the importance of continuity of care, understanding licensure across

state lines, and planning for a path to payment.

## The 6-step pre-game

This first six steps of the playbook provide a general foundation for a telehealth program. This base needs to be in place before a practice takes the next, more detailed steps to implement telehealth. These steps involve:

- | **Identifying a need.** COVID-19 is an immediate need, but telehealth also can address opportunities or challenges practices face on a regular basis.
- | **Forming the team.** Implementation involves teamwork from those who have on-the-ground knowledge, open communication and a commitment to success.
- | **Defining success.** Set specific short- and long-term goals with measurable metrics early.
- | **Evaluating the vendor.** Use six key variables, including usability and customer service, to find the best partner.
- | **Making the case.** Develop the business case and get the leadership team to buy into the plan.
- | **Contracting.** Lay the groundwork for a successful long-term vendor relationship.

## 6 steps at game time

Once the leg work is done, the next six steps help practices focus on the unique details to consider as they make telehealth a reality for the practice.

- | **Designing the workflow.** Consider how to implement telehealth visits with the least amount of workflow interruption and seek to understand patient, clinician and staff needs.
- | **Preparing the care team.** Thorough workflow, collaboration and training leads to successful telehealth integration.
- | **Partnering with the patient.** Prepare patients through a patient-centered approach to engagement and education.
- | **Implementing.** Launch the program and execute the plan.
- | **Evaluating success.** Revisit goals, measure achievements and determine what worked and where you might need to pivot.
- | **Scaling.** Leverage successes to expand telehealth to other clinicians, departments or use cases. Grow smart, not fast.

## Post-game

The playbook ends with extra resources practices can tap for more information, tables and charts to help practices succeed and downloadable worksheets and tools that can be printed out or modified to meet a practice's unique needs.

If you are expediting your telehealth implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic, the AMA also has created the AMA quick guide to telemedicine in practice to support physicians.

The AMA's COVID-19 telehealth guidance allows you to see how the AMA is advancing telemedicine during the pandemic, including new policies on treating pain and new CPT resources to help physicians adapt to the shifting COVID-19 demands and more.

Stay up to speed on the AMA's COVID-19 advocacy efforts and track the fast-moving pandemic with the AMA's COVID-19 resource center, which offers a library of the most up-to-date resources from JAMA Network™, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization.