Need help paying for telehealth? $200 million FCC fund could help

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If you are looking for financial assistance in providing telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, a newly created $200 million government program may be able to help defray the costs of continuing to provide care to patients remotely.

The COVID-19 Telehealth Program is part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is taking applications for assistance now. The AMA—which supports telehealth as a way of continue to care for patients while keeping physicians and patients safe—has created a webpage to help physicians navigate the funding opportunity.

Eligible health care organizations such as nonprofit hospitals, local health departments and others can use the money to pay for telecommunications services, information services and the devices they need to connect with patients remotely to continue to provide care. Some applicants will receive full funding for these eligible telehealth services and devices, the FCC says.

Those approved for funding will need to submit an invoicing form and supporting documentation to receive reimbursement for eligible expenses and services.

Money will be awarded on a rolling basis and will be available until the program runs out of money or until the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

“Our goal is to select applications that target areas that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and where the support will have the most impact on addressing the health care needs,” according to an FCC statement.

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
Do I qualify?

Nonprofit and public eligible health care providers qualify for the financial assistance. Among those eligible are:

- Post-secondary educational institutions offering health care instruction, teaching hospitals and medical schools.
- Community health centers or health centers that provide health care to migrants.
- Local health departments or agencies.
- Community mental health centers.
- Nonprofit hospitals.
- Rural health clinics.
- Skilled nursing facilities.

What do I need to submit?

Applicants will need an eligibility determination. Those who do not have one already can file FCC Form 460 with the Universal Service Administrative Company, according to the FCC. When eligible health care providers submit their applications, they will need to certify that they comply with, among other things:

- The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other applicable medical licensing laws and regulations as waived or modified for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- All applicable COVID-19 Telehealth Program requirements and procedures, including the requirement to Record-retention requirements to demonstrate compliance with the COVID-19 Telehealth Program requirements and procedures for three years following the last date of service, subject to audit.

More AMA telehealth resources

With more physicians than ever using telehealth to deliver care during the pandemic, the AMA has numerous resources to aid physicians now and after the emergency ends.
For physicians looking to expedite telehealth implementation during the pandemic, the AMA created the AMA quick guide to telemedicine in practice.

For practices continuing to implement telehealth beyond the pandemic, the Telehealth Implementation Playbook walks 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 that offers 12-step processes to guide physicians in implementing various digital health solutions. For example, another guide 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.

The AMA also offers physicians COVID-19 Telehealth Guidance, a collection of articles that show how the AMA is advancing telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.