Telehealth Impact Summary

The AMA is leading the charge to aggressively expand telehealth advocacy, research, and resources and continues to engage key industry stakeholders to better understand key needs around coding, coverage, and physician and patient pain points.

AMA has focused our advocacy efforts at the state and federal level on allowing physicians to deliver care via telehealth, expand access for all patients, and ensure fair and equitable payment.

Expanding access, coverage, and payment

Major expansions in telehealth coverage and increased Medicare payment rates during public health emergency in response to AMA advocacy, including:

- Telehealth available to Medicare patients nationwide, wherever they are located including in their homes.
- Vital services added to Medicare telehealth list, and many telehealth services to be covered at least through end of 2021.
- Telehealth payment rates increased to in-person visit rates.
- Telehealth covered for new and established patients and remote monitoring covered for acute and chronic conditions.
- CPT codes for audio-only visits switched to covered, separately payable services, with payment rates equivalent to established patient visits.
- Numerous private payers followed Medicare’s lead to ensure access to care for patients.
- Continued advocacy for telehealth services to be covered beyond the telehealth emergency.

- CMS permanently changed the definition of equipment that can be used for telehealth to include smart phones if they are capable of two-way real-time interactive communication.

AMA provided state-level policy recommendations and guidance to expand coverage, access and payment of high quality telehealth:

- Created Issue Brief to provide telehealth policy guidance to lawmakers during COVID-19 and beyond.
- All 50 states took some action to expand access, coverage or payment of telehealth during the public health emergency.
- Created state laws charts summarizing key provisions in state telehealth laws to inform and identify legislative trends.
- Ongoing advocacy with leading state policy organizations, including NGA, NCOIL and NAIC.
Addressing chronic disease

- Advocacy on opioid epidemic and pain treatment led DEA to offer significant telehealth and audio-only flexibilities for controlled substance prescribing and opioid use disorder treatment during public health emergency.
- Medicare Diabetes Prevention Program (MDPP) transitioned to virtual sessions during COVID-19 and future public health emergencies.

Self-measured blood pressure (SMBP) services (and new CPT codes) covered by Medicare as of 1/1/2020, further aligning covered services to hypertension clinical guidelines; including the use of patient-generated data using validated BP devices.

200+

Media mentions of AMA’s 2020 telehealth efforts including highlights in publications such as The New York Times, Harvard Business Review, Medical Economics, Becker’s Healthcare, Forbes and MobiHealthNews

Virtual

Speaking engagements at leading national industry conferences and events such as HLTH, Rock Health, COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition, American Telemedicine Association national conference and more.

Led

And contributed to discussions and critical analysis around equity in telehealth and digital innovations that has engaged thousands of people.

Developing the code set for the future of medicine

- CPT Panel adopted new codes for Remote Therapeutic Monitoring and the new Digital Medicine Taxonomy as an appendix in CPT.
- Ongoing policy collaboration and advancement of telehealth and digital medicine payment through the AMA Digital Medicine Payment Advisory Group (DMPAG).

AMA research spurs solutions that keep physician and patient needs at the forefront of telehealth delivery.

- Completed and released results for AMA’s Digital Health research that has helped to serve as an industry benchmark for physician telehealth usage pre-COVID.
- Completed COVID-19 Physician Practice Financial Impact research to understand financial resources needed for practices.
- The AMA interviews physicians to combine experience with proven processes to develop practical, tested implementation resources.
- AMA initiated research focused on assessing the “return on health” (financial, clinical outcomes, health equity, access, patient, and physician experience) for virtual care that will be available in 2021.
- AMA co-led the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition Physician Telehealth Impact Survey with leading organizations such as Mayo, MITRE, American Telemedicine Association and others.
- Conducted a survey of marginalized and minoritized physicians that included assessment of telehealth utilization and challenges.
AMA has developed resources to optimize telehealth implementation and to remove burdens.

- The AMA Telehealth Implementation Playbook and Telehealth Quick Guide support physicians and practices in successfully implementing and adopting telehealth.
- A coding scenario resource and a tool comparing Medicare telehealth coding and payment policy to private health plan policy.
- The Telehealth Initiative (TTI) led by state medical societies (Texas, Florida and Massachusetts) and the Physicians Foundation that provided education, support and leadership for 24 practices to successfully implement telehealth. The program included 6 webinars, 2 mini-bootcamps, data collection opportunities, and access to over 100 resources.
- The Self-measure Blood Pressure (SMBP) 7-step guide for clinical practices and the launch of the Validated Blood Pressure Device Listing™ (VDL).
- AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education consortium convened a telehealth advisory group and executed the Engaging Learners in Telemedicine webinar.
- Physician-focused CME with practical advice on how to select and implement a telehealth service model. This includes AMA’s STEPS Forward Telehealth module.
- AMA Physician Innovation Network virtual panel discussions that convene industry stakeholders to discuss topics such as telehealth.
- Resources to ensure networks are secure and safe from cyberattacks as they deliver telehealth outside of the office setting.

For more information on AMA’s ongoing telehealth efforts, visit www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/telehealth-research-key-resources-definitions