

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that public policies and practices should promote access to care for people with mental health conditions. NAMI supports laws and policies that expand the use of telehealth practices to support a wide range of effective and accessible mental health care services.

Why We Care:

Despite a growing demand for mental health services, many people across the U.S. are still unable to receive the help they need. Over half of U.S. counties have no psychiatrists, and even in areas that have mental health providers, there are often not enough to meet the need — especially if patients must travel long distances to reach available providers.

Telehealth is a growing, effective way to provide mental health care when patients and providers are in different physical locations. It supports long-distance clinical health care using two-way telecommunications technologies like computers, tablets, or cell phones. This can improve access to mental health care and can give patients and providers more flexibility. Telehealth can eliminate the barrier of needing transportation and decrease “no-shows,” resulting in greater continuity of treatment. For some populations like children and adolescents, it may also create a better experience than traditional therapy sessions. Additionally, telehealth can increase access to culturally competent and clinically specific clinicians, for underserved individuals.

Interest and use of telehealth have expanded in recent years, yet some forms of health care insurance have limited coverage for telehealth services. These restrictions rapidly changed during the COVID-19 global pandemic to help limit risk of exposure during in-person visits. The federal government significantly expanded access to telehealth, including telemental health, for

individuals covered by Medicare at the beginning of the pandemic through the end of the public health emergency declaration. Likewise, states were provided additional flexibilities to expand telehealth coverage and reimbursement for their Medicaid programs. These temporary flexibilities have highlighted the promise of telehealth in supporting timely and safe access to mental health care services.

NAMI believes that all people with mental health conditions who are incarcerated deserve access to quality mental health treatment.

Telehealth has been shown to improve patient satisfaction and be cost effective for many diagnoses and has become an essential tool to help improve mental health care access. NAMI believes policymakers should strengthen and expand telehealth coverage for mental health across all settings and forms of health coverage, including allowing reimbursement for new patients using telehealth. At the same time, providers and insurers should be encouraged to promote patient privacy protocols when patients use telehealth services. Additionally, further research should be prioritized to better understand different modes of treatment that best serve individual needs.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities