

Care for the Common Good

Telehealth

Flexibility after COVID-19 Public Health Emergency



Trinity Health is one of the largest not-for-profit, Catholic health care systems in the nation, serving diverse communities across 25 states. We advocate for public policies that promote care for the common good including expanding health care coverage and care, investing in public health, paying for high-value care, and improving the health of communities.

Telehealth Flexibility

The telehealth flexibilities afforded during the COVID-19 pandemic greatly benefitted patients, caregivers, and providers.

Across Trinity Health, the number of telehealth visits increased from approximately 6,000 in March 2020 to more than 30,000 in the winter of 2021. While utilization of telehealth has dropped as pandemic restrictions have been lifted, it continues to exceed 10,000 visits per month. Internal analysis indicates telehealth visits are replacing some in-person visits while not increasing overall utilization.

Trinity Health's experience demonstrates telehealth must become a routine part of patient care to maintain access and meet consumer expectations for convenient, person-centered, technology-supported care. We are committed to ensuring that all patients have the ability to use telehealth services when needed, including the most disadvantaged. We urge Congress and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to implement policy changes that support the permanent continuation of telehealth flexibilities to enable an efficient and equitable health care system.

What Can Policymakers Do?

Maintain telehealth flexibilities beyond the public health emergency:

- Allow all telehealth visits to be reimbursed when originated within the patient's home or location of their choosing.
- Allow all Medicare patients access to telehealth, regardless of geographic location.
- Allow clinicians to furnish and bill with parity of payment for in-office visits across all payers and settings.
- Ensure audio-only remains a reimbursable option for physicians to care for patients who do not have audio and visual technology or capability.
- Clarify the facility component of telehealth offered in a provider-based clinic is eligible for reimbursement.
- Reimburse providers for telehealth services in home health benefits.
- Include attribution to an ACO as evidence of an existing provider/patient relationship.
- Maintain flexibility for remote-patient monitoring and reimburse for this service, including when provided through home health.
- Allow clinicians to be reimbursed for telehealth when seeing new patients or a patient not previously seen at their practice.
- Remove limitations on frequency of services.
- Advance policies that ensure access to affordable broadband, technology resources, and telehealth services for communities of color and other underserved populations.
- Allow providers to practice across state lines and at the top of their license, including medication prescription and flexibility to allow physicians to treat their patients while in a state where they may be temporarily located.

Telehealth Experience

- The use of telehealth services spans payers and programs. In the spring of 2020, more than 25% of patient visits counted toward Trinity Health's national accountable care organization (ACO) were provided via telehealth. While that share has since declined to around 4%, telehealth continues to be an important access point for our national ACO.

- Both patients and providers appreciate the benefits of telehealth:

"I feel fortunate that I was able to schedule a telehealth appointment with my primary care physician (PCP). The [telehealth] visit was a simple and seamless way to get high-quality care. My PCP had immediate access to all my electronic medical records. I didn't feel rushed, and I felt like I got the care I needed in short order. And, the resulting prescription ended up being precisely what I needed."

~ Patient (who wishes to remain anonymous), Springfield, Mass.

"With telehealth, consumers are quickly learning that high-caliber, well-coordinated care can be delivered at the time and location of their choosing. Telehealth services can offer both convenience and quality for a wide variety of concerns."

~ Dan Weiswasser, MD, Trinity Health Of New England

Mission

We, Trinity Health, serve together in the spirit of the Gospel as a compassionate and transforming healing presence within our communities.

Core Values

Reverence • Commitment to Those Who Are Poor • Safety • Justice • Stewardship • Integrity