

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 21, 2020

To: Residential Eating Disorders Consortium

From: Center Road Solutions

RE: Telebehavioral Health in Light of COVID-19

On July 14 the World Congress presented a webinar entitled, “Telebehavioral Health in Light of COVID-19: Payers’ Perspectives on Recent Policy Changes, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations for Long-term Sustainability”. In response to the current pandemic, federal and state legislation and regulation has rapidly changed to increase access and break down barriers to the availability, delivery, and reimbursement of telebehavioral health services. The webinar sought to shed light on recent state and federal changes and how commercial payers are approaching behavioral health services to address their members’ needs. Specifically, the webinar shared information regarding telehealth state initiatives and partnerships to increase access to mental health services and examine how the changes may extend or be made permanent in a post-pandemic world.

Key Takeaways:

- Studies show that behavioral health remains an urgent concern throughout the healthcare industry. Nearly 20% of the U.S. population has a diagnosable behavioral health condition, yet just 66% of these psychiatric needs are currently being met.
- The health system’s main objectives for creating a system-wide telebehavioral health program include lowering the cost of care by reducing the average patient length of stay, reducing the impact of chronic conditions and behavioral health conditions on facilities, and improving patient and provider access to behavioral health professionals.
- Federal agencies and states have temporarily expanded access to telehealth services to increase access to care. One strategy that states and territories are leveraging to deliver behavioral health services and reduce health disparities during this pandemic is telebehavioral health, a form of telehealth that utilizes virtual communication technologies to provide mental health and substance use services.
- Telebehavioral health is beyond telepsych and licensed clinical social worker therapy sessions. This delivery model can be extended to case managers and social workers for more proactive outreach for caseloads.

Q&A

Q: What do you do for those individuals/patients who don’t have good Wi-Fi connection?

A: Brad Lerner, Vice President, Government Affairs, Associate General Counsel

- We want to make sure our members are getting treated and if all they have is a phone, we have to weigh the efficacy of what’s happening with the type of treatment to make sure it’s actually a useful use of their time with the abilities and constraints of this pandemic.

Q: How do stakeholders/providers assess that quality and efficacy is still being provided?

A: Pamela Mobberley Supervising Counsel, Cigna Legal - Behavioral Health

- By monitoring members participation, no-show rates, monitoring outcomes, monitoring declines in patient hospitalizations, and monitoring engagement.

Q: In terms behavioral health and considering we're in a public health emergency, what do you think will happen to the policies that the federal government and states temporarily put in place?

A: Adam R. Easterday Vice President, Regulatory Affairs, Optum Health

- I think there's a need there and I think that there's an awareness on the part of the policymakers. There was a study done after the SARS pandemic that behavioral health needs continued 3 years after the actual pandemic ended. There is definitely a true need for those behavioral health services and an extension of the flexibility in the law to continue to support behavioral health services after the pandemic.

Q: How do you provide care that may not be optimal for virtual care?

A: Brad Lerner, Vice President, Government Affairs, Associate General Counsel

- Just like on the physical health side we aren't going to see surgeries, you can't set a broken bone via phone, so within behavioral health we've seen pre-COVID and during this pandemic that it's very successful to have cognitive, psych behavioral therapy and psychotherapy.