



The Hospital + Healthsystem
Association of Pennsylvania

Leading for Better Health

FACTS ABOUT TELEHEALTH

What is Telehealth?

Telehealth is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications in order to improve a patient's clinical health status.

Two-way video, email, smartphones, wireless tools, and other forms of telecommunications technology can be used to deliver high-quality health care through telehealth.

Telehealth is not a separate service in health care. Rather, it is another tool in the delivery of health care that has the potential to increase Pennsylvanians' access to specialized care, save time and costs, and decrease unnecessary readmissions.

Impact of Telehealth in Pennsylvania

Telehealth can be used to connect a specialist to a patient at a distance. It can be used to deliver life-saving care, as well as deliver routine care in a timely, cost-effective manner. Services delivered through telehealth can save time and money, as well as enhance health outcomes and support population health.

Telehealth can increase consumer access to specialists in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

- The ability for patients in rural areas to access specialists through telehealth may mean travel time and costs saved for the consumer, as well as new interaction with a provider.
 - About 27 percent of the state's 12.7 million residents—nearly 3.5 million people—lived in Pennsylvania's 48 rural counties during 2010. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Even in urban and suburban areas, it may be difficult for consumers to access the right care at the right time and place (i.e. patients cannot secure an appointment for months, are not able to take off work, etc.).

Other positive impacts of telehealth for Pennsylvanians include: improved access to behavioral health care services and helping the state maintain physicians and health care services.

Examples of Telehealth Services Currently Provided in Pennsylvania

Many Pennsylvania hospitals are finding ways to provide telehealth services because it's the right thing to do.



Several key examples of telehealth services are:

- **Telestroke:** When it comes to a stroke, seconds count. The typical stroke victim loses 1.9 million brain cells each minute a stroke is left untreated.
 - o With telestroke, a stroke victim could survive the traumatic event with greater quality of life and spend much less on health care costs for rehabilitation and other services.
- **Teledermatology:** Dermatologists are specialists that may be difficult to access across Pennsylvania. Even getting checked for a non-life-threatening dermatology issue, such as a rash, could prove to be difficult and result in months of waiting to be seen by a professional.
 - o With teledermatology, the patient can take a photograph of the skin issue, send it to the specialist, and receive diagnosis and a treatment plan within minutes.

Why It's Critical That All Insurance Companies Pay for Telehealth Services

The health care delivery system is rapidly changing, and the adoption and implementation of telehealth technology is an expensive undertaking.

HAP believes that all health insurers should be required to provide payment for telehealth services, if they pay for the same service in person. Currently, some health insurers cover telehealth, but not all; it is not required.



Action Needed

Health care consumers are demanding more convenient and accessible care. The Pennsylvania hospital community wants to deliver on the promise of providing the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

HAP supports Pennsylvania legislation that:

- Defines telehealth
- Offers guidelines outlining who is able to provide health care services through telehealth technology
- Requires all health insurers to provide payment for telehealth services, if they pay for the same service in person

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia require that private insurers cover telehealth the same as they cover in-person services. Pennsylvania hospitals believe that now is the time for action to support telehealth in the commonwealth.