

Issue Brief

Telehealth



The Issue

- Telehealth is an effective way to provide needed health care services to people in medically underserved areas especially rural areas and in areas where accessibility to specialty care is needed.
- Telehealth, also referred to as telemedicine, provides real-time, two-way interactive video and audio communication between patients and physicians or other health care providers, who are often at a distant site.
- Presence Health has been a leader in developing and providing telehealth services since 2005, and is currently utilizing proven systems to provide telemedicine in several critical areas of need, including:
 - providing psychiatry and behavioral health services.
 - monitoring patients in intensive care units (Tele-ICU).
 - minimizing the damage caused by strokes (Telestroke).
 - coordinating care teams as patients are discharged (Warm Nursing Handoff).
 - preventing falls and providing support for hospitalized patients (Remote sitter) and at-risk individuals (Lifeline).

Impact

- Telehealth is cost-efficient. It allows Presence Health to continue providing the highest quality of health care to everyone in the communities we serve.
- Telehealth allows specialists, like psychiatrists, neurologists or critical care physicians, to take care of patients in areas where there are not enough specialists.
- Physicians, advanced practice nurses and specially trained health care professionals can provide remote monitoring, treatment and support that lets people get the care they need, when they need it, in their own community.

Our Position

- **We need parity in payment and reimbursement to improve access.** Currently, private, for-profit insurance companies can decide whether or not to cover telehealth services. Medicaid covers telehealth but only with additional regulatory and operational burdens. If these additional requirements are not met, then Medicaid will not reimburse. Finally, Illinois does not require parity in payment.
- **Presence Health wants to reduce barriers to telehealth.** We have worked with members of the State Legislature to remove barriers to Medicaid reimbursement of telepsychiatry. Additionally, we would like to see Medicare loosen its restrictions on where telehealth can be delivered. There are access issues not only in rural areas but also where specialists are hard to find.

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- **Telehealth is a mode of healthcare delivery.** Telehealth is not a separate and distinct service, rather a modality that enables providers to deliver already-covered care in away that improves health and lowers the cost of care without increasing utilization (*Alliance of Community Health Plans.*)
- **Expanding telehealth helps meet Illinois patient needs.** Presence Health supports the State of Illinois' CMS 1115 Waiver proposal to improve its Medicaid program through the development of a statewide specialty telemedicine network. Approval is still pending. Currently, we are piloting a project with Proviso Township's 708 Board to provide online psychiatry and behavioral health services in Proviso Township, where there is a shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health providers. Untreated behavioral health conditions can dramatically disrupt the lives of families, reduce workplace productivity and drive up health care costs by increasing utilization. It is vitally important that we reduce the barriers that prevent individuals from seeking the care they need.