

Teledentistry:

Removing barriers and moving toward implementation



Teledentistry has been shown to increase access to care, improve health outcomes, and reduce costs. Yet, while teledentistry use across the United States is growing, a variety of state-level barriers make it harder for health systems, hospitals, and safety-net clinics to adopt teledentistry initiatives. Obstacles vary somewhat from state to state, but there are some common barriers as well as actions that can be taken to overcome these obstacles.

Barrier:

State Practice Acts do not recognize the important role of dental hygienists and dental therapists as providers of teledentistry.

Potential Solution: Amend State Practice Acts to expand the dental workforce able to practice teledentistry.

The current landscape: Dentists are critical providers when it comes to improving oral health within a state or community. At the same time, dental hygienists, dental therapists, community dental health coordinators, and dental assistants must also be tapped to allow teledentistry to reach its full potential.

Action Steps:

1. Create a State Practice Act that:

- > permits each dental provider to practice to the full extent of their education and credentials
- > enables oral health professionals to provide care in community settings
- > permits appropriate supervision regulations rather than imposing universal direct supervision
- > enables dentists to extend their practice in a way that creates equitable access to dental care

State Practice Acts vary by state and territory. To learn more about existing laws in the 50 states, District of Columbia and territories, visit www.scopeofpracticepolicy.org

About Scope of Practice

A health care provider's scope of practice refers to what they can or cannot do when providing care for a patient. It is defined by state professional regulatory boards through State Practice Acts — typically with the guidance or instruction of the state's legislature — and considers a broad range of issues including health care professionals' supervision requirements, prescriptive authority, and other considerations for practice.



Dental team members, deployed in community sites, can [directly contribute](#) to cost containment by reaching people early in the disease process and reducing the cost of providing diagnostic, preventive, and early intervention services.

Barrier:

Limited reimbursement for teledentistry.

Potential Solution: Update reimbursement policies.

The current landscape: Although the American Dental Association (ADA) has added Current Dental Terminology (CDT) codes for dentists to use when providing teledentistry services, reimbursement for such care by insurers is inconsistent and/or limited in duration (i.e., put in place temporarily in response to the pandemic).

Action Steps:

1. Update reimbursement structures within public and private insurance to:

- > allow coverage for remote provider-patient interactions through synchronous and asynchronous mechanisms beyond the current pandemic
- > stipulate parity regardless of whether the procedure or service is provided using teledentistry methodologies or in-person encounters
- > offer at least some elements of a value-based framework that includes reimbursement for preventive services provided via teledentistry
- > be consistent across dental provider types and service types

Telehealth as Communication Tools

To create a legal environment that supports the use of telehealth, it is useful to consider telehealth as a [set of communication tools](#).

Telehealth is not a specific service, but a collection of means to enhance care and education delivery.



Creating Telehealth Parity Across Medicaid and Commercial Markets

[Telehealth parity](#) means that any procedures and services that are paid for when performed in person are also paid for when they are accomplished through/via telehealth interactions.

Barrier:

Provider concerns about legal issues.

Potential Solution: Enhance legal clarity.

The current landscape: Providers have expressed concern about legal issues that discourage their participation in telehealth efforts. These issues include liability coverage for health care providers, compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and getting “credentialed” or approved for participation in an insurer’s provider network, and data security.

Action Steps:

1. Address and clarify legal issues by:

- > creating public policy statements affirming that liability coverage is in effect regardless of whether providers are using in-person or telehealth modalities as long as they are performing procedures that are permitted under their license
- > developing regulations that allow for the use of telehealth while also ensuring data security and stipulating that patients’ personal health information may not be disclosed without permission

Additional key points to consider:

- > Requirements to comply with HIPAA apply to [patient privacy and data security](#) whether care and services are provided in a dental office environment or via telehealth.

Barrier:

Inability to share patient information and work collaboratively.

Potential Solution: Make it easier for providers to share patient information.

The current landscape: Electronic health records (EHRs) are an important vehicle for enhancing the quality of care. Because oral health and overall health are so interrelated, it is imperative for dental and medical providers to share critical patient information through health information exchanges (HIEs). This will allow for improved provider-to-provider consultations, referrals, and shared treatment plans.

Action Steps:

1. Improve medical providers' awareness of the link between oral and overall health and the need for collaboration with dental providers.
2. Prioritize health systems interoperability of dental and medical EHRs.
3. Encourage states to explore financial incentives or subsidies to enable dental care organizations to upgrade technology and provide necessary training to staff as infrastructure evolves, so they can better participate in state or regional HIEs.

Convening Stakeholders

State health commissioners and Medicaid directors can play helpful roles by convening health systems, software vendors, and other stakeholders to discuss strategies that advance interoperability.

Barrier:

Lack of knowledge and awareness and slow adoption of teledentistry among dental providers.

Potential Solution: Incorporate teledentistry into dental education curriculum.

The current landscape: Although teledentistry provides new opportunities to improve access to care, this model of oral health care is still new and unfamiliar to many providers. More research and education are required to support its widespread use.

Action Steps:

1. Advocate for the Commission on Dental Accreditation to incorporate teledentistry into all dental education curricula, including for dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, and dental therapists.
2. Conduct more research on the impact of teledentistry on patient care.

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