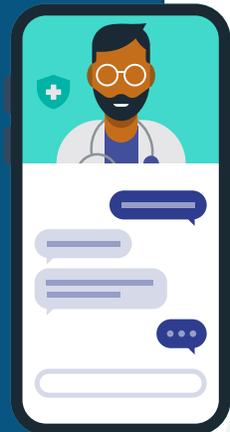


Telehealth for Medications for Addiction Treatment (MAT)

PROVIDER RESOURCE



This information serves as a resource for policies and regulations, emerging best practices, and tools and resources to support delivery of medications for addiction treatment (MAT) via telehealth in California.

Contents

- 1 Key Facts 3**
 - What is telehealth for MAT? 3
 - What are the latest policies and regulations on telehealth for MAT? 3
 - What are the best resources to stay up to date on policy changes? 4
 - What are current advocacy initiatives to continue telehealth in California? 5

- 2 Service Delivery 6**
 - What are key principles for providing telehealth for MAT? 6
 - What are the benefits and challenges of telehealth for MAT? 7
 - What do California providers report about providing telehealth for behavioral health needs? 8
 - What guidance is available to learn more about best practices? 9

- 3 Patient Education and Access 10**
 - How can I help my patients access telehealth for MAT? 10
 - What tools and resources can help my patients learn more about telehealth for MAT? 11

- 4 General Telehealth Resources 16**

- 5 References 17**



What is telehealth for MAT?

In California, telehealth is defined as “The mode of delivering health care services and public health via **information and communication technologies** to facilitate the diagnosis, consultation, treatment, education, care management, and self-management of a patient’s health care while the patient is at the originating site and the health care provider is at a distant site.

“Telehealth facilitates patient self-management and caregiver support for patients and includes synchronous interactions and asynchronous store and forward transfers” (DHCS, 2021).

Medications for addiction treatment (MAT), sometimes referred to as medication-assisted treatment, refers to FDA-approved prescription drugs for substance use disorders (SUDs), including opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides a [comprehensive resource for MAT practitioners](#).

What are the latest policies and regulations on telehealth for MAT?

Federal

In January 2022, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services ([CMS](#)) [letter to providers](#) updated the Telehealth Services List and provided other guidance around modifiers and fees.

As procedures and best practices continue to evolve to address the ongoing challenges and aftermath of COVID-19, it is important to stay current with changes, updates, amendments, and new policies and regulations. You can use [Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#) to search for current and pending legislation relevant to telehealth.

State of California

In February 2022, the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) published a policy paper proposing the implementation of broad changes that would continue to allow additional Medi-Cal covered benefits and services to be provided via telehealth when clinically appropriate. These proposed changes are guided by the principles of equity, access, standard of care, patient choice, confidentiality, stewardship, and payment appropriateness. Some of the specific services and strategies included:

- Continue baseline coverage of synchronous telehealth
- Continue baseline coverage of asynchronous telehealth

- Continue payment parity
 - All county-administered behavioral health reimbursements will be cost based until behavioral health payment reform via California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) (anticipated July 2023).
- Continue coverage of brief virtual communications in physical health
 - Add coverage of virtual communications (specifically e-visits) to 1915(c) Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waivers, Targeted Case Management (TCM), and Local Educational Agency Medi-Cal Billing Option Program (LEA BOP)
- Continue to reimburse Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) at Prospective Payment System (PPS) rate for otherwise billable visits delivered via telehealth
- Establish new patients via telehealth (DHCS, 2022)

You can use [California State Legislature—Laws](#) to search existing laws relating to telehealth and [California State Legislature—Bills](#) to search for proposed and pending legislation.

What are the best resources to stay up to date on policy changes?

The following resources are helpful for staying current on policy changes.

TITLE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION
List of Telehealth Services CMS	CMS	Details telehealth services covered by Medicare in 2022
Medi-Cal & Telehealth	DHCS	Comprehensive resource from DHCS on telehealth under Medi-Cal
CCHP Home	Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP)	Website that explains relevant laws and regulations as well as their impact (sponsored by the National Telehealth Policy Resource Center)
California Current State Laws and Policy	CCHP	Focuses on California telehealth laws, with tabs for COVID-19, Medicaid, Private Payer, and Professional Requirements
Telehealth FAQ- California Board of Psychology	California Board of Psychology	Telehealth FAQs
Telehealth Learning Series FAQs	Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Network	FAQ #3 provides guidance on HIPAA secure platforms and measures

What are current advocacy initiatives to continue telehealth in California?

As a provider, you can use your voice to advocate for continued coverage and support for telehealth. Current initiatives include the following:

- Advocate for legislation to continue reimbursement for all forms of telehealth
- Advocate for expanded access to broadband internet
- Create a grant program from the state general fund to help patients get affordable internet services and phones/laptops/tablets
- Support the purchase of provider telehealth equipment in healthcare facilities in March 2023 (support from the Behavioral Health Response and Rescue Project)
- Develop and fund workforce training and technical assistance

Stay up to date by connecting with the [American Telemedicine Association](#).





What are key principles for providing telehealth for MAT?

Individual choice is critical.

- Patients must be offered their choice of service delivery mode: via telehealth or in-person care.
- Patients should retain the right to receive health care in person, with the understanding that there may be a future public health emergency or natural disaster that affects the availability of in-person care.
- The level of care provided via telehealth must meet the same evidence-based standards as in-person care.
- Providers must obtain informed consent to treat via telehealth.

Different populations may have different needs.

Equity and access were the first two guiding principles laid out by the February 2022 DHCS policy paper. As a fundamental framework, equity focuses on addressing disparities in care to every enrollee, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, income, class, disability, immigration status, nationality, religious belief, language, or geographic location. Leveraging telehealth modalities expands access to adequate, culturally responsive, patient-centered, equitable, and convenient health care. The following links provide specific resources for three different populations.

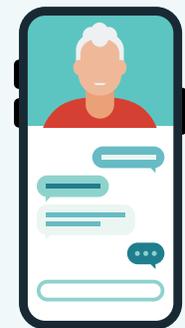
TITLE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION
Policy Statement: Medication-Assisted Treatment of Adolescents With Opioid Use Disorders	American Academy of Pediatrics	Policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics that addresses recommended treatment methods as well as issues with access and support (2016)
HITEQ Center – Telehealth Strategies and Resources for Serving Patients with Limited English Proficiency	Health Information Technology, Evaluation, and Quality (HITEQ) Center	Downloadable PDF outlining resources for serving patients with limited English proficiency
Indian Health Services (IHS), Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) 638, Clinics (ind health) (ca.gov)	IHS	Searchable document from IHS covering topics such as enrollment, services available, prescriptions, mental health visits, and telehealth

What are the benefits and challenges of telehealth for MAT?

As with most systems-change initiatives, telehealth comes with its benefits and its challenges. It is essential that recommending its use come from an informed understanding of each patient's needs and preferences. The following benefits and challenges were compiled from the [California Behavioral Health Planning Council 2020 Data Notebook](#) and a survey of Hub and Spoke sites in California.

	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
FOR PATIENTS	<p>High levels of patient satisfaction and increased patient engagement</p> <p>Increased access for consumers, particularly in rural areas or for consumers for whom transportation is an issue</p>	<p>Lack of computer or mobile device</p> <p>Lack of or inadequate internet service</p> <p>Inability to afford internet service or mobile data plan</p> <p>Lack of privacy in home</p>
FOR PROVIDERS	<p>Benefits to staffing, including increased morale, retention, and access to out-of-county providers</p>	<p>Consumer distrust of telehealth services</p> <p>Need for more training for staff</p>
FOR BOTH	<p>Flexibility</p> <p>Reduced cancellations/improved appointment attendance</p>	<p>Consumer distrust of telehealth services</p> <p>Fewer in-person interactions</p> <p>Need for alternatives to urine screening</p>

MAT for telehealth can help people in all types of situations get the care they need.



What do California providers report about providing telehealth for behavioral health needs?

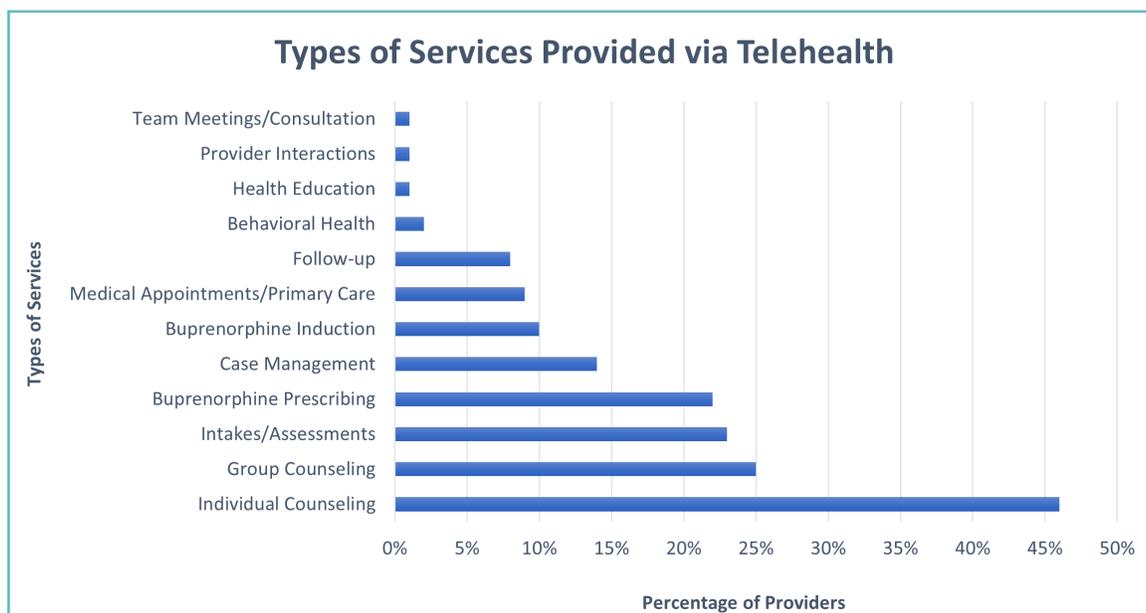
In April 2021, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc. (AHP) conducted a survey of California Hub and Spoke System sites on the use of telehealth for MAT.

Summary of results

- Seventy sites out of 86 surveyed (81%) responded.
- Sixty-four sites (91%) are currently using telehealth to deliver services. One site stated they will soon be adopting telehealth.
- For those six remaining sites not providing telehealth, the barriers reported are the patient population’s lack of access to technology and internet connection, the sites’ lack of infrastructure (technology and internet connection), and the preference for in-person visits.
- The two sites that reported lack of access to technology and internet connection for both patients and providers were from the Capital and NorCal regions.
- No sites from SoCal reported this as a barrier, and all are providing some form of telehealth for their patients.
- Only one site from Bay Area/Midstate is not providing telehealth but reported “no barriers at this time.”

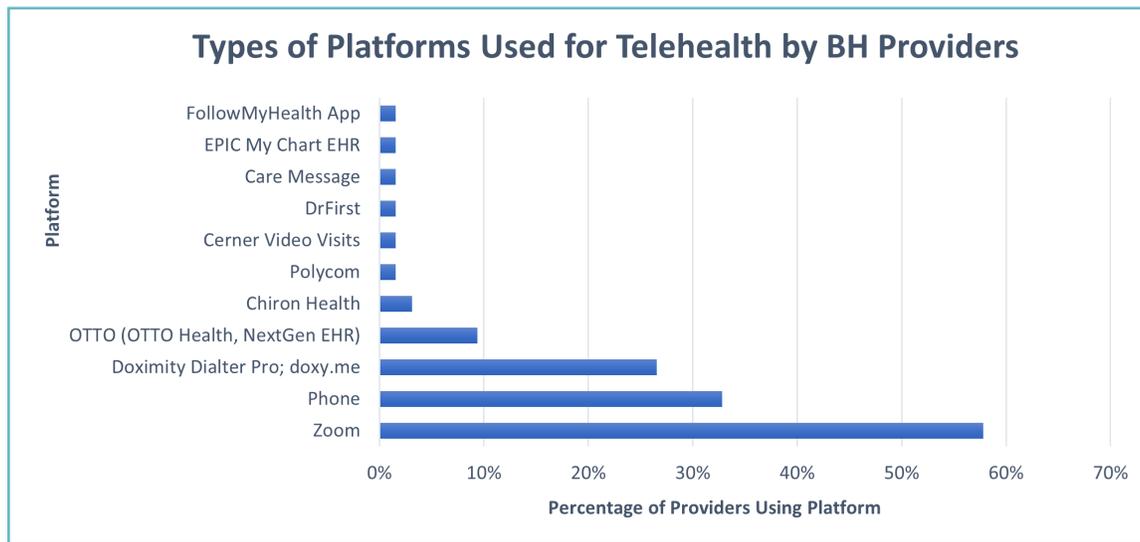
Common telehealth services

The most common services provided via telehealth by behavioral health providers, according to the AHP survey, are detailed in the chart below.



Common telehealth platforms

The most common types of telehealth platforms used by providers are listed below. In summary, 34% of sites use more than one platform, most commonly a video platform and telephone service, and seven sites are only using telephone for telehealth services. Of those, five are exclusively using telephone for individual counseling.



What guidance is available to learn more about best practices?

Access to a range of tools, strategies, and best practices prepares providers to be more effective, flexible, and responsive in meeting patient needs. The following links can supplement your existing resources.

TITLE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION
Telehealth for the Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders	SAMHSA	Guidance for implementing evidence-based practices, examples of telehealth implementation in treatment programs, and resources for evaluation and quality improvement
Telehealth for Opioid Use Disorder Toolkit	Providers Clinical Support System	Guidance, directives, and recommendations on drug monitoring and urine toxicology screening
Tips for Using Videoconferencing to Deliver SUD Treatment and Recovery Services	Mountain Plains ATTC	Resources on using technology and videoconferencing when providing behavioral health services
Supporting Telehealth and Technology-assisted Services for People Who Use Drugs: A Resource Guide	National Council for Mental Wellbeing	Recommendations, tools, and examples from the field to better implement telehealth and technology-assisted services

3

Patient Education and Access



How can I help my patients access telehealth for MAT?

Some programs cover internet costs and offer discounts to buy devices. The following are two examples.

Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program offers discounts on broadband internet service to eligible households. To learn more:

- Phone: (877) 384-2575
- Link: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

California LifeLine

The California LifeLine program offers discounts on home phone or cell phone bills to eligible households. To learn more:

- Phone
 - 1-866-272-0349 (English)
 - 1-866-272-0350 (Spanish)
- Links
 - <https://www.californialifeline.com/en>
 - <https://www.californialifeline.com/es>

What tools and resources can help my patients learn more about telehealth for MAT?

Patients may have several concerns about telehealth for MAT, ranging from privacy concerns to access. In response, an online patient-facing FAQ and a printable “Can Telehealth for MAT Work for Me?” flier and an educational video are available as resources.

Patient Frequently Asked Questions

This chart answers commonly asked questions about MAT via telehealth in California.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What is telehealth for MAT?	<p>Telehealth is a visit with a healthcare provider on the phone or on a computer. You can connect with your provider without going to their office. This might happen on a video platform, by talking on the phone, or by texting.</p> <p>Medications for addiction treatment (MAT) refers to prescription drugs for substance use disorders. Your provider can help you with MAT in a telehealth visit. They can offer assessment, start you on medication (this is sometimes called induction), monitor your symptoms, and provide individual and group counseling in telehealth sessions.</p>
Is telehealth private?	Telehealth protects your privacy. The programs used encrypt or hide all your communications.
What if I don't have internet service or a computer or laptop?	<p>The Affordable Connectivity Program offers discounts on broadband internet service to eligible households. To learn more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phone: (877) 384-2575• Link: https://www.fcc.gov/acp <p>The California LifeLine program offers discounts on home phone or cell phone bills to eligible households. To learn more:</p> <p>Phone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1-866-272-0349 (English)• 1-866-272-0350 (Spanish) <p>Links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.californialifeline.com/en• https://www.californialifeline.com/es

<p>How do I get ready for my telehealth visit?</p>	<p>Follow these steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a private space. • Check your internet to make sure you're connected. • Make sure your phone or computer is set up for a visit. For example, see if your camera works. • Have everything you need with you. This includes the names of your current medications and a list of any questions you might have. • Sign in a few minutes before your session.
<p>What do I do if I'm having trouble connecting?</p>	<p>Try one or several of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close your web browser and open it again. • Restart your device. • Make sure your device is charged or plugged in. • Try connecting with a different device. • If nothing works, reach out by email or phone to your provider for help.
<p>What if I speak a language other than English?</p>	<p>Many providers have interpreters. Check with your provider before your first session.</p>
<p>What if I don't have a private space where I live?</p>	<p>Some providers have private spaces at their offices where you can use computers for telehealth.</p>
<p>What if I have a hearing impairment?</p>	<p>Before your first session, ask your provider if they have text-based services or captioning.</p>
<p>Can I use my phone for a telehealth visit?</p>	<p>Yes. If you have a smartphone, you can do a video visit. You can also just talk on your phone. Many providers will text with you.</p>
<p>How do I start in-home medications?</p>	<p>Here's an example set of instructions for in-home induction:</p> <p>How-to-Start-Buprenorphine-naloxone-at-Home-Suboxone-Induction.pdf (careinnovations.org)</p> <p>If you have questions, talk to your provider.</p>
<p>Do I have to use telehealth, or can I meet someone in person?</p>	<p>You have a choice. You can choose to use telehealth or see your provider in person.</p>

Can Telehealth for MAT Work for Me?

Telehealth Basics

What is telehealth for MAT?

Telehealth is a visit with a healthcare provider on the phone or on a computer. You can talk or text with your provider without going to their office. This might happen on a video platform, by talking on the phone, or by texting.

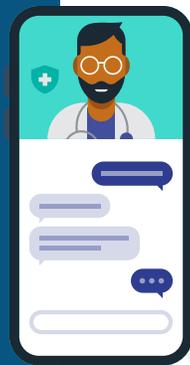
Medications for Addiction Treatment (MAT) refers to prescription drugs for substance use disorders. Your provider can help you with MAT in a telehealth visit. They can offer assessment, start you on medication (this is sometimes called induction), monitor your symptoms, and provide individual and group counseling in a telehealth session.

What do I need for a telehealth visit?

- A private space
- A phone, tablet, laptop, or computer
- An internet connection

Do I have a choice about using telehealth?

Yes. Using telehealth for MAT is your choice. You may choose in-person visits if you prefer.



How do I get ready for a telehealth visit?

- 1 Find a private space, like a room where you can shut the door.
- 2 Check your internet connection.
- 3 Make sure your phone or computer is set up for a visit.
- 4 Have everything you need with you. This includes the names of your current medications and a list of any questions you have.
- 5 Sign into your telehealth visit a few minutes before the session.

Common Concerns



I speak a language other than English.

Many providers have translators available to help.

I have a hearing impairment.

Many providers have texting options or captions for video platforms.

I'm worried about keeping my personal information safe.

Providers use special programs that protect your privacy.

I don't have a computer or internet access.

If you don't have a computer or internet access, that's ok! Some providers have "Zoom rooms" for you to use. These are rooms at their office you can use for telehealth visits.

Also, some programs cover internet costs and offer discounts to buy devices. The following are two examples. Your provider may know of others.

Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program offers discounts on broadband internet service to eligible households. To learn more:

 **Phone:** (877) 384-2575

 **Link:** <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>

California LifeLine

The California LifeLine program offers discounts on home or cell phone bills to eligible households. To learn more:

 **Phone:**
1-866-272-0349 (English)
1-866-272-0350 (Spanish)

 **Links**
<https://www.californialifeline.com/en>
<https://www.californialifeline.com/es>

I have more questions.

Contact your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns. They can help you!

Educational Resources and Tools for Patients

TITLE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION
Free Telehealth Resources for California Patients	California Telehealth Resource Center	Patient- and family-focused information including an introductory video, educational materials, success stories, and links to other resources
Telehealth: For patients	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Links to further information and guidance on topics such as telehealth and COVID-19, getting help with access, preparing for a virtual visit, and telehealth and privacy for patients
How to Start Buprenorphine or Naloxone at Home (Suboxone Induction)	Care Innovations	Guidance and informational graphics for self-administering and regulating the dosage and frequency of at-home induction
To Keep Your Telehealth Visit Private	Center of Excellence for Protected Health Information	Tips on how to keep your telehealth visit private, including protecting your communications, preparing your surroundings, and protecting your devices such as a phone or laptop
How to Prepare for a Video Appointment with Your Mental Health Clinician	SMI Adviser (An American Psychiatric Association and SAMHSA initiative)	Guidance on how to prepare for a video appointment, including what to do the day before, the day of, and just before the appointment starts

4

General Telehealth Resources



The following resources cover general information on telehealth in California.

TITLE	AUTHOR	DESCRIPTION
Telehealth Definitions	DHCS	Key terms related to telehealth
Telehealth Resources	California Telehealth Resource Center	Resource center with tabs for tools and resources, events, and training and education
California Telehealth Network	California Telehealth Network	Information on technologies and services to improve access to high-quality health care for medically underserved and rural Californians
Telehealth and Technology-assisted Services Resource Guide	National Council for Mental Wellbeing	Recommendations, tools, and examples from the field to better implement telehealth and technology-assisted services



Advocates for Human Potential. (April 2021). Summary of telehealth survey of Hub & Spoke System sites.

California Department of Health Care Services. (2021, February 2). Post-COVID-19 public health emergency telehealth policy recommendations: Public document. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/DHCS-Telehealth-Policy-Proposal-2-1-21.pdf>

California Department of Health Care Services. (2022, February 3). Department of Health Care Services post-COVID-19 public health emergency telehealth policy recommendations. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/DHCS-Telehealth-Policy-Paper-2-3-22.pdf>