

# COVID-19

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## Rapid alignment on telehealth: How payers and providers can support patients and clinicians

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As health care organizations move to quickly stand up and [scale telehealth and digital health capabilities](#) in response to COVID-19, it is critical to consider the imperatives and implications for all stakeholders — patients, providers and payers, etc. While we are in a period of crisis response and social isolation today, it is important for health care organizations to align now to implement solutions that not only drive rapid progress, but also ensure long-term benefit for all stakeholders.

### Heightened urgency for telehealth

As the COVID-19 crisis advances, health care organizations face a two-sided problem. First, how can they properly care for their COVID-19 patients without neglecting — or endangering — other patients? Second, how can they ensure providers, as well as clinical and support staff, are able to work effectively and safely?

Telehealth and digital technologies offer valuable capabilities to triage patient volumes and continue to provide care to all patients, whether with a suspected COVID-19 infection or without. Telehealth platforms offer a way for providers to treat patients virtually, thereby limiting exposure in clinic and hospital settings and promoting safer care for patients, especially at-risk populations. Moreover, solutions that can be run from a laptop, tablet or smart phone allow clinical staff

to work together, even from multiple locations with minimal technology needs. This means that the growing number of clinicians in self-isolation (whether because of suspected exposure or with minimal symptoms) who are well enough to work can continue to “see” patients. It also means that both clinical and administrative staff can work from home, while still supporting their families due to school closures, sick family members, etc.

### Engaging patients in virtual care

For virtual care to be effective now and in the future, patients and members must become comfortable using it. How can providers and payers get patients to engage with new telehealth platforms and modes of care at such a time as this? Payers have been working to engage their members in many of these virtual care offerings for years prior to COVID-19. Now, the challenge lies in getting a greater share of their members comfortable with using these telehealth capabilities quickly during a stressful time. For many providers, this is newer territory. They must help patients wade the waters of adopting new telehealth capabilities, while simultaneously working to stand up telehealth platforms and optimize their staff on these new systems.

For both payers and providers, this is an area where communication and marketing can shine by making virtual

care very simple, clear and easy for patients and members to navigate and understand. Whether revising call-line scripts and scheduling options, sending text messages with a direct link to virtual visits, updating patient-facing websites with virtual options, or putting special instructions on the landing page of provider websites, the goal is to reduce patients' anxiety and give them confidence in this new care model.

The same is true for patient adherence. In this new environment, patients and members are feeling great pressure to use these new telehealth technologies, and have a host of questions for both their provider and health plan. Patients are sensitive to the number of places they have to go, passwords they have to remember, etc. Just as clinicians are sensitive to the number of clicks they have to make in the EHR and other technology platforms, streamlined patient solutions are paramount to adoption.

### Supporting providers in optimizing care

Payers should work to be nimble and flexible in supporting providers in their networks who are standing up telehealth platforms and processes. Aligning the right payer support (e.g., case management, utilization management) and the right provider clinical talent to a modality of care in this unprecedented virtual care delivery world enables an increased bandwidth for clinicians at provider organizations, takes into account physician attrition in projections, and promotes creativity in handling the surge of volumes both payers and providers are experiencing.

There is also huge opportunity for payers to collaborate with and send information to their entire provider network to enable a smoothing of the COVID-19 curve. The best thing payers can do now as it relates to virtual care adoption is to support their members, support their providers, model out the current needs for both constituencies, and prepare to leverage these lessons learned operationally when the COVID-19 dust settles.

To set themselves up for success now and post-COVID-19, providers need to take a holistic approach to telehealth and digital health that takes into account how clinicians and

patients interact with the new platforms and technologies. Developing cohesive telehealth applications that complement existing systems and processes will help staff move up the learning curve more quickly and create an intuitive user experience for patients. And aligning with payers offers a valuable opportunity to share information and lessons learned to smooth the transition.

It is an overwhelming time for health care executives. There are not enough hours in the day to execute all of the urgent priorities on your plate. Optum Advisory Services is here for you. Our mission is to provide support and resources to help health care organizations care for their patients and members in the best way possible. The COVID-19 crisis is an unprecedented situation — one in which drastically accelerated adoption of telehealth and other digital health technologies can make a meaningful difference for the patient and member experience, today and in the future.

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If you're looking for support on rapid IT responses and telehealth strategy and rollout during the COVID-19 crisis, please [contact us](#).

### Meet our experts



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