



Let us help.

[***Provider Guide to Telehealth Visits >***](#)

Welcome. Many healthcare facilities created emergency Telehealth plans and workflows to meet the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some facilities have used Telehealth for many years now and want to expand their service offerings. Others are just discovering the possibilities of Telehealth in their communities, for their patients.

No matter where your facility is along the spectrum of healthcare providers who offer Telehealth, this guide will help develop your program efficiently, help identify and patch gaps in your current programs, and help you meet the needs of the people you serve.



**WILDERNESS
HEALTH**

Partners advancing rural health



Caring for your patients through Telehealth

Patients who seek care through Telehealth can receive a broad spectrum of services, from the comfort of their own community. In rural and underserved areas, Telehealth is a way to make sure that disparities (due to geographic location, transportation barriers, childcare, work scheduling challenges, and weather) don't get in the way of seeking healthcare.

Healthcare facilities can use Telehealth to ensure their own financial stability. Use of Telehealth may increase the range of services, and patient populations, that a facility can serve. Offering Telehealth options can reduce no-shows and improve health outcomes.



Connecting your patients to TeleMental Health

TeleMental Health is a way of delivering mental and behavioral healthcare. In addition to the benefits of care through Telehealth, there are specific advantages to TeleMental Health.

TeleMental Health connects rural patients to greater expertise.

Rural communities cannot always sustain a range of mental health providers. Residents in rural communities can reach out to specialists in behavioral health, psychiatry, developmental psychology, and other specialties through Telehealth.

TeleMental Health offers privacy.

Some patients may not feel comfortable entering mental health facilities for many reasons (whether it be anxiety or social perceptions of mental health). In some close-knit towns, it may be tough to find a professional that a patient doesn't know socially. Offering TeleMental Health allows privacy desirable to many, especially in a smaller community.

You might be delivering care via Telehealth. You might be referring your patients to expert care delivered through Telehealth from another provider. In either case, you are using Telehealth to bring the best care to your patients.

Preparing your patient for Telehealth

You may intend to offer Telehealth to your patients, yourself. You may refer patients for Telehealth services from another provider. In both cases, there are a few steps to help your patient prepare for their visit.

Identify the patient best served by Telehealth

- Develop criteria to identify patients whose needs are best met through Telehealth and who are likely to succeed if their healthcare is delivered in this format.
- Make sure to be inclusive in your criteria so as not to exclude patients who could benefit.

Invite the Patient

- Prepare and use scripts for inviting and supporting patients in Telehealth appointment scheduling. For example, “Would you like your next visit to be in-person or by Telehealth?” Use these scripts to educate patients on the advantages and challenges of Telehealth, to help them make the best choice for them.
- If the patient consents to Telehealth, explain that agreeing to Telehealth visits may change the form of care and payment systems and may have other implications.

Educate and prepare the patient

- Set expectations for the Telehealth encounter. These include knowing

what the patient can expect from a provider and what the provider will expect from the patient.

- Show the patient how to download the app or log in to the platform for their Telehealth visit.
- Encourage the patient to seek the necessary adaptive technologies and support well in advance of the session. Possible patient needs include:
 - If vision is a problem, the patient may need a screen reader, closed captioning or other adaptive technologies.
 - If English is not the patient’s first language, they can work with the provider to request a translator.
 - If the patient is uncomfortable with technology, they can reach out to community groups that support access.

Where rural patients may have limited access to technology or internet, there are community resources that can support them. *(See resources at the end of this document.)*

Share the Wilderness Health Telehealth Patient Toolkit

Share the Wilderness Health Telehealth Patient Toolkit with your patient. This guide explains the benefits of Telehealth and supports them as they prepare for their visit.

Meeting with your patient via Telehealth

If you are ready to deliver care through Telehealth, yourself, we have some advice and best practices below.

Communicate with the patient before the session

- If you will be delivering the care via Telehealth, determine how you will communicate with patients prior to the appointment.
- Confirmation is typically done by text message, email, phone call or messages in a patient portal.

Prepare for the Session

- Set up the “exam room”—the space behind the provider which will be visible on camera. This space can put a patient at ease or magnify their discomfort.
- Dress to the same level of professional attire as in-person care.
- Follow all the courtesies of a successful Telehealth visit—use friendly camera angles, set your microphone volume, use soft but bright lighting, turn off other web applications and all notifications that could disrupt your attention on your patient, and so on.
- Where possible, use dual screens for EHR documentation and note taking.

Communicate with the patient in the session

Be patient. Just like in-person, people can be intimidated by

healthcare visits, especially when they are unfamiliar with how Telehealth works. Acknowledge that people are adapting to the change and be courteous of their concerns.

Speak clearly. An online format can sometimes make it even more difficult to fully communicate questions and care instructions. Make sure that you’re using the appropriate language to avoid confusion.

Use non-verbal language to signal that you are listening.

Clarify. Some patients might be nervous about the prospect of sharing medical information online. Assure them that their information is protected and confidential and make sure to answer any questions they may have about how the visit or program works.

Be yourself. Aim to make the visit as comfortable and normal as possible. Treat the patient as you would if they were physically sitting in front of you—be friendly and establish rapport.

Verbalize and clarify next steps, such as follow-up appointments, care plan, prescription orders.

Telehealth is more important now than ever. As a healthcare professional, you already know this. By making Telehealth as seamless as possible you can keep doing what you do—providing quality care!

Helpful Icons

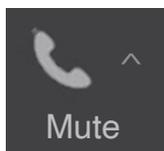
There are many ways to connect through telehealth video. Each one has its own look. Once you've logged in, here are a few things to look for:



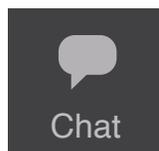
This button controls your camera. A slash through it means your patient cannot see you.



This button controls your microphone. A slash through it means your patient cannot hear you.



You may also see this button. You can click this off and on to mute and unmute your microphone.



When you click this button, a chat box will open up. The chat box lets you type and send messages to your patient.



This button is usually red. Clicking on it will end your telehealth video meeting.



Building your Telehealth practice

This section of the toolkit offers advice and strategy necessary to build a Telehealth Program at your facility. By “Telehealth Program,” we mean moving beyond scheduling sessions online (as we often did in response to the pandemic)—taking it to the next level by making Telehealth an integral part of your practice.

The approach to Telehealth developed by Wilderness Health is designed to serve our member hospitals and clinics. Wilderness Health approaches Telehealth through what we call **The Five Domains.**

- 1 Patient Experience, Quality and Inclusivity
- 2 Human Resources and Referral Networks
- 3 Technology and HIM
- 4 Finance and Compliance
- 5 Marketing and Community Engagement

The Five Domains may be helpful as you understand the development of Telehealth at your institution.

Patient Experience, Quality, and Inclusivity: It's important to develop a program that considers the health needs of all people in our communities, that makes Telehealth technology easy to access, and that ensures patients receive quality care. Ideally, patients should evaluate that care highly and understand that Telehealth improves outcomes. This domain reinforces commitment to reducing disparities due to socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, geographic, language, disability, or other factors.

Human Resources and Referral Networks: Telehealth requires us to think collaboratively, within our clinics and hospitals and into the greater ecology of healthcare providers in our region. Who is qualified to deliver Telehealth? Who is able to support patients in Telehealth? And with whom can we connect in new ways?

Technology and Health Information Management (HIM): A successful program keeps in mind the deep variations in what a patient brings to the Telehealth table (in internet connection, software, hardware such as phones and computers).

Within your facility, IT support will be essential. Having an integrated Telehealth system that is compatible with the EHR will help reduce stress on your support system.

Finance and Compliance: Finance and Compliance regulations in healthcare are constantly changing—and Telehealth delivery models exist in an especially volatile but hopeful regulatory and reimbursement environment. Staying up to date on changes in coding, billing, documentation, policies, liability insurance, data privacy and licensure requirements will be vital to financial viability.

Marketing and Community Engagement: A successful Telehealth program invites the community to partner with us as we build new ways to access care. A first step, through formal traditional and social media marketing, raises awareness and reduces stigma in the public. But marketing is not enough—partnership with local advocacy groups helps build community buy-in to the process.

Understanding the five domains will help you see the partnerships you need to build, as we invite the diverse participants in healthcare to be part of its transformation. The five domains will focus your attention on the expertise you need to foster and the energy you need to create within your institution and community.

Finally, healthcare practitioners should consider *licensure, reimbursement, liability insurance* and *regulations* (including HIPAA and state privacy regulations) as they move toward Telehealth. Below are some helpful resources as you begin to explore Telehealth in your facility, derived and supplemented from the American Medical Association's resource list for Telehealth.

- The **AMA Advocacy Resource Center** provides materials for physicians and physician advocates focused on state telemedicine policies and issues.
- The **Federation of State Medical Boards** provides telemedicine policies by state.
- The **Center for Connected Health Policy** has various federal and state-based resources, including Telehealth policy and reimbursement by state and the state tracker covering topics such as regulatory, cross-state licensing, and reimbursement.
- The **Great Plains Telehealth Resource and Assistance Center** (gpTRAC) is a federally funded technical assistance center located at the University of Minnesota. It provides training, tailored consultations, and print and web-based resources to healthcare organizations of all kinds seeking to design, implement, grow, sustain, and evaluate Telehealth services.
- The **Telehealth.hhs.gov** website offers resources and tips on how to best engage with Telehealth. This tool is meant for both patients seeking care and practitioners delivering care via Telehealth.

Consult these resources. When you are ready, begin to build your team, the Wilderness Way.



Community Resources for Patients

For help with technology, use resources like these:

Access North Center for Independent Living has an Assistive Technology lending library. They are able to loan items out and provide demonstrations when needed. Find them online at <https://www.accessnorth.net/>

Lighthouse Center for Vital Living (formerly "Vision Loss") After completing a referral form, Lighthouse will do a brief assessment to figure out specific needs. Lighthouse offers a certified Assistive Technology Professional who has a wealth of experience. Visit them online at <https://www.lcfvl.org/>

For help with interpreting, use resources like these:

Minnesota Department of Health maintains a list of interpreters here: <https://hcir.web.health.state.mn.us/searchInterpreter.jsp>

For help with internet access, use resources like these:

Lifeline is a program that will apply up to \$9.25 in credit to a patient's phone or internet bill.

The **Affordable Connectivity Program** can help a patient pay their internet bill. They can ask their current internet company for more information. Visit <https://acpbenefit.org>

This publication is supported by the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$771,767 with 5% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

Wilderness Health is a collaborative of independent health care providers in Northeastern Minnesota and Northwestern Wisconsin. By working together, the group is advancing patient and community health outcomes, improving the patient experience, and lowering costs. The collaborative is focused on rural health issues that impact its members and their patient base. By growing our membership base and forming partnerships, Wilderness Health will continue to expand the impact we can make together.



This guide was created as a resource for the implementation of Telehealth at Wilderness Health member hospitals and clinics serving the communities of Northeastern Minnesota and Northwestern Wisconsin.

If you are interested in learning more about Telehealth (or affiliating with Wilderness Health) you can find more resources at <https://wildernesshealthmn.org/>.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only. It is not intended as medical, legal, financial, or consulting advice, or as a substitute for the advice of an attorney or other financial or consulting professional. Each healthcare organization is unique and will need to consider its particular circumstances and requirements.

Last updated date: October 10, 2022

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