

# TELEHEALTH EXPANSION

The expansion of telehealth during the pandemic has been a lifeline for many Kentuckians. Increased access to this high-quality, convenient care must be made permanent.

## How has telehealth changed during the pandemic?

- Telehealth has expanded rapidly and allowed health care to be delivered safely during the pandemic.
- According to a KMA survey of over 300 physician members, approximately 74 percent of physicians indicated using telehealth during the pandemic, despite only 10 percent having used the service on a regular basis before COVID-19, with a majority planning to continue offering the service.
- Previous telehealth legislation laid the groundwork for Kentucky to be well-positioned for the use of telehealth during the crisis; however, Federal and State government action was still needed to relax many restrictive telehealth rules (e.g., prohibition against audio-only) and expand telehealth coverage.
- The expansion of telehealth coverage and services during the pandemic has greatly increased access to care, and while federal action is required to retain certain changes, others can and should be made permanent at the state level.

## How will House Bill 140 help Kentuckians?

- Lack of access to reliable broadband internet service and/or smart devices as well as patient unfamiliarity with technology continue to be barriers to telehealth throughout much of the state. House Bill 140 addresses these barriers by allowing telehealth services to continue to be delivered through standard, audio-only telephone calls.
- House Bill 140 expands the definition of telehealth to include remote patient monitoring (RPM), where patient data are remotely collected and then analyzed by the patient's health care provider. RPM can improve management of chronic conditions and outcomes by monitoring patients at home and helping to keep them out of the hospital and Emergency Department.
- House Bill 140 removes the face-to-face restriction for a number behavioral health services permitting these services to continue to be delivered via telehealth after the expiration of the public health emergency.
- House Bill 140 requires telehealth visits to be reimbursed at the same rate as in-person visits, which will increase continuity of care by allowing more patients to receive telehealth services from their own primary care physicians and Kentucky-based specialists.

## Why is it critical to pass House Bill 140 in 2021?

- Audio-only services are a crucial component in improving access to care in rural and underserved areas. Access to high-quality, safe, and convenient care should not be determined by zip code or the availability of broadband internet service.
- Expanding telehealth to include audio-only services has the potential to decrease inequities in health care by ensuring accessibility for vulnerable populations. A large, multi-disciplinary study of telehealth services during the pandemic showed that older patients, females, Black, Latinx, and patients with lower household income were more likely to use the audio-only option for telehealth services.
- The pandemic will continue to have long-term effects on our health care system, including the need for additional behavioral health services. Easy access to these critical services via telehealth must continue after the expiration of the public health emergency.
- Chronic physical and mental health conditions account for 90% of annual health care expenditures in the U.S. Telehealth and remote patient monitoring can be used to better manage high-risk, chronic conditions and prevent more costly forms of care in the future.
- House Bill 140 provides a unique opportunity for Kentucky to continue to lead the way on telehealth and modernize health care delivery in the Commonwealth.

**Support House Bill 140 to help expand telehealth services and provide Kentuckians with access to care when and where they need it!**

