

FY22 – 23 Proposed California State Budget Telehealth: Trailer Bill Language

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OVERVIEW

Today, more than 1,300 Community Health Centers (CHCs) in California provide high-quality comprehensive care to 7.2 million people – that is 1 in 5 Californians. CHCs provide the full spectrum of care, from primary care to dental to behavioral health, to everyone who walks through their doors, regardless of their ability to pay, their immigration status, or their individual circumstances.

TELEHEALTH

Community health centers (CHCs) are leveraging telehealth to improve access to care and meet increasing patient demands. Telehealth has been an important way for patients to access care during the pandemic and it will be critical to post pandemic care. Telehealth decreases barriers and increases access to care for health center patients and reduces the no-show rates significantly. Making current telehealth flexibilities permanent, including telephonic allowances for health centers, will be key to California's recovery – allowing individuals to get their care in a safe and effective manner. As a result, maintaining telephonic flexibilities will be critical to supporting health equity.

TELEPHONIC CARE

Specifically, telephonic (audio only) care has become a reliable modality of care. Recent surveys conducted by the California Health Care Foundation reported a significant shift to telehealth and telephone visits. National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) conducted a survey and found that 85% of health centers found that audio-only care increased the ability to reach vulnerable populations, which is vital in making health care more equitable.

TELEHEALTH AND DISPARITIES

Broadband and internet service issues plague health centers in rural and frontier communities and as a result, providers cannot always guarantee a video visit, which requires greater connectivity. Or, at times, must pivot last minute from video to audio. By comparison, regardless of a clinician's location, audio only visits work well.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Since the beginning of the pandemic, providers have

seen an increase in depression, fear, loneliness, and anxiety. If untreated, these conditions could escalate to severe or fatal outcomes. Patients are accessing behavioral health services now more than ever before. In addition to an increased number of visits, health centers are reporting decreased no-show rates as telehealth removes barriers in accessing care. NACHC's survey also revealed that over 90% of health centers believe failure to extend the current telehealth flexibilities beyond the PHE will lead to greater difficulty reaching vulnerable populations, and over 80% state that inaction will lead to worse outcomes for patients with behavioral health or substance use need.

THE SOLUTION

PCPA and CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates is advocating to on expand telehealth trailer bill language to maintain the greatest telehealth flexibilities post December 2022.

Last year, Governor Newsom signed AB 133 – an omnibus health trailer bill that made a commitment to maintain all current telehealth flexibilities, including payment parity for audio-only modalities, through December 31, 2022. DHCS recently released Trailer Bill Language for post December 2022, and we are pleased to see positive developments and a commitment to telehealth flexibilities, including payment parity post December 2022.

PCPA and California Health + Advocates hopes to work on expand on the Trailer Bill Language's limited approach to allow greater flexibility for CHCs to establish new patients. The proposed limitations around new patients undermine recent improvements for patients who have historically faced barriers to accessing in-person services and who have limited access to the technology and high-speed data necessary for a synchronous video visit. While we support policies that help ensure patients can make informed choices when accessing health care services, we have concerns regarding the Department's current proposal that appears to impose additional disclosure and consent requirements pertaining to telehealth services that may be seen as a barrier.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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