



Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana  
HMO Louisiana

March 20, 2020

## Re: Expansion of telehealth for remote care during COVID-19

Dear Provider:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana is closely monitoring the spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) to determine how it could affect the services you bring to our members, while also protecting our employees and the communities we serve.

We are doing everything we can to help with the national message on social distancing, and the telehealth services you provide can help ensure our members have access to the care and medications they need during this time of public health emergency.

Therefore, in response to the COVID-19 national emergency, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana is expanding its telehealth policy as a way to keep provider offices up and running to meet the needs of patients.

At this time, we are expanding our telehealth policy to allow any credentialed, network physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, behavioral health specialist, or physical, occupational or speech therapist to provide telehealth services to replace office visits. Providers must follow the telehealth billing guidelines in the provider manual and agree to Blue Cross' allowable charges.

The expanded telehealth policies outlined here are effective for dates of service on and after March 16, 2020. They will continue to be effective until we are past this national emergency. Blue Cross will notify providers when the expanded telehealth policies are no longer effective. Additionally, we will continue to review our telehealth guidelines and may update in the future as new developments occur.

**Thank you for working with us as we diligently review our processes to better meet your changing needs as you serve our members, especially during this time of uncertainty** Please continue to communicate with Blue Cross as your needs change to meet the COVID-19 crisis. We value you as a key part of our provider networks and the services you bring to our members—your patients.

### Contact Us

If you have any questions about the billing of COVID-19, you may send an email to our Provider Relations department at [provider.relations@bcbsla.com](mailto:provider.relations@bcbsla.com). Please put "COVID-19 Billing" in the subject line.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hiral Arges".

Hiral Arges  
VP, Provider Relations and Contracting  
Network Administration

HA/jrm

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## Blue Cross Telehealth Policies

Our current telehealth policies includes a direct-to-consumer (DTC) telehealth program that is available to providers utilizing their own telehealth platform/technology as outlined in our *Professional Provider Office Manual* available online at [www.BCBSLA.com/providers](http://www.BCBSLA.com/providers) >Resources >Manuals. Section 5.37 includes our Telemedicine/Telehealth guidelines including requirements and a list of the DTC reimbursable CPT®/HCPCS codes and provider types.

A few important reminders about telehealth service requirements:

- Telehealth encounters must be performed using both audio and visual technology.
- Providers must use either HIPAA compliant or Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights (OCR) approved non-public facing platforms for telehealth services. Providers can find additional details in the OCR memo entitled, "Notification of Enforcement Discretion for Telehealth Remote Communications during the COVID-19 Nationwide Public Health Emergency," issued March 17, 2020.
- Encounters must be fully documented in the patient's medical record.
- Telehealth claims will be paid using standard member cost shares.
- We do not cover text messaging, as this does not meet the complexity of services required for reimbursement.
- We do not reimburse for calls seeking triage advise, routine medication refills and routine follow-up calls that are done by the practice on a regular basis.

## Telephone service exceptions to ease the limitations of COVID-19

Our telehealth policy typically excludes encounters that do not include both video and audio transmission. During this time of public health crisis, we are allowing reimbursement for telephone calls (audio-only) as a replacement for office visits in limited circumstances outlined below for both primary care providers and specialists. Claims will be paid using standard member cost shares. This will apply to credentialed network physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, psychiatrists and psychologists.

The provider should bill with the appropriate telephone services CPT code (99441–99443).

To bill services delivered by telephone if they meet the following criteria:

- Patient must be an established patient seen in a face-to-face encounter within the past two years.
- The encounter must be with the patient.
- A problem focused history must be obtained that, at minimum, includes the history of present illness, a review of pertinent past medical history and a pertinent review of symptoms.
- Decision making must be of low complexity (as defined by the CPT code book) and not require a physical examination.
- Medication reconciliation must be completed.
- Appropriate instructions, including follow-up, are provided to the patient.
- The telephone visit is fully documented in the patient's medical record.

Blue Cross will not reimburse telephone services for the following:

- Services that are otherwise not a covered benefit or reimbursable.
- Services that require complex decision making and/or a physical exam (this should be done in a face-to-face encounter).
- Services provided to new patients.
- Consultation, Nursing Facility, Custodial Care, Home services.
- Calls for the sole purpose of one or two of the following: triaging patients, following up on test results, obtaining referrals to specialists, ordering of tests, medication refills or other minimal services typically handled by physician offices through a routine telephone call.

### **Behavioral Health Services**

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, Blue Cross will allow any of our credentialed, network behavioral health specialists provide telehealth (audio and visual) or telephone (audio only) encounters to replace office visits.

Behavioral health encounters must adhere to the telehealth and telephone guidelines outlined above. Claims will be paid using standard member cost shares.

For telehealth encounters, a comprehensive listing of behavioral health CPT/HCPCS codes is included in Section 5.37 Telemedicine/Telehealth guidelines of our *Professional Provider Office Manual*. For telephone behavioral health encounters, psychiatrists and psychologists should use telephone service CPT codes 99441–99443. Licensed professional counselors and social workers should use telephone service CPT codes 98966–98968.

The expanded telehealth policy will include applied behavioral analysis (ABA) services. We will update our ABA providers with more details soon.

Blue Cross will continue to review the need to add additional codes for behavioral health services provided via telehealth or telephone. We will update our behavioral health specialists if this occurs.

### **Telehealth Physical/Occupational/Speech Therapy Services**

During this crisis, any credentialed network physical, occupational or speech therapist can provide limited telehealth encounters to replace office visits.

- Therapy providers must adhere to the above telehealth guidelines.
- Therapy providers filing claims for telehealth should use standard office billing practices and CPT codes along with a place of service code 11 and Modifier GT or 95. As a reminder, therapy providers billing telehealth services must continue to adhere to the billing and coding outlined in Section 5.8 Chiropractic and Physical Medicine Services guidelines of our *Professional Provider Office Manual*.
- Telehealth therapy services are limited to the following CPT codes: 97161, 97162, 97164, 97110, 97112, 97116, 97530, 97535, 97165, 97166, 97168, 92507, 92521, 92523, 92524, 92610, 96105, 92522, 92526
- Blue Cross will not reimburse telehealth services for CPT codes 97163 and 97167 due to their complexity requiring a face-to-face encounter and examination.
- Claims will be paid using standard member cost shares.

Further research is currently being done regarding the continued provision of school-based speech therapy due to school closures.

## **BlueCare**

BlueCare is Blue Cross' telehealth service that lets patients have online doctor visits 24/7. BlueCare can be a good wraparound service for your patients who feel too ill or are unable to visit your office.

BlueCare works on any device that has internet and a camera, like a smartphone, laptop, tablet or computer and is available in all 50 states. BlueCare is an effective way to get care for routine, non-emergency health needs like colds, allergies, rashes, pink eye, bladder infections and vomiting/diarrhea. BlueCare providers are U.S. trained, board-certified doctors who can give prescriptions or refills for most drugs.

To learn more or create an account, members can go to [www.BlueCareLA.com](http://www.BlueCareLA.com) or get the "BlueCare" (one word) app for Android and Apple devices.