



Telehealth Flexibilities Enable Community Behavioral Health Providers to Effectively Serve Floridians

As we are almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, access to life-saving services is more important than ever as data shows an increase in the need for these services. Experts believe that the pandemic and its economic impacts will lead to a significant increase in substance use and mental health care crises. A July 2020 poll from Kaiser Family Foundation indicated that 53% of adults reported negative impacts on their mental health due to the pandemic.

■ Florida’s community behavioral health providers reported an increased need for mental health and substance abuse services.



Federal and state policies authorized telehealth flexibilities, including audio-only, which allowed providers to quickly pivot and offer Floridians virtual appointments throughout the pandemic. Providers’ experiences using telehealth demonstrates that it is an effective way to provide services and should be a continued option for patients after the pandemic is over.

■ Florida’s community behavioral health providers report that using telehealth improved patient services.



Client telehealth testimonials on next page.

Client Testimonials on Telehealth Services

"Elizabeth," who lives in Fort. Walton Beach, is a foster mother who has several children, three of whom are in treatment. Elizabeth said that she likes telehealth because it is easier to manage her foster children's' doctors appointments.

Elizabeth said she is so appreciative of telehealth because now she does not have to pack up several children to sit through hours of appointments. She enjoys not having to keep the other children busy while trying to interact with the prescriber during treatment time and the child receiving treatment.

"Samantha" is a 33-year-old mother living in Live Oak and she recognized her mental health instability recently when her and her mother got into a confrontation over the holidays. She was brave enough to reach out for help and was relieved to know that her behavioral health center could meet her needs and work with her through telehealth.

She expressed that attending the appointment from the comfort of her home assisted in reducing her anxiety and she had a more effective, client-centered therapeutic session.

"John," a 20-year-old young man in a behavioral health outpatient program in the Tampa area, came into care after being frequently Baker Acted. Because of COVID-19, his behavioral health facility promptly set him up for telehealth services.

This allowed him to review and practice the skills he was learning prior to telehealth, and become more confident to put them in place, in his everyday life and is now living in a dorm at a Florida University. He maintains services with the same behavioral health organization virtually, so he can do telehealth appointments with his psychiatrist and case manager.

"Arthur," 69, suffers from Schizophrenia. Sadly, COVID-19 created many barriers to care access due to closures and physical distancing. Prior to telehealth, "I had to walk to the bus stop and take several busses to get to here [behavioral health facility]. It was so hot and so hard physically. It took me over two hours to get there and the same on the way back. Now, with this telehealth I am so much better," Arthur said.

"Ms. Johnson," who has a phobia of being in public around people, and her daughter, who suffers from anxiety, both live in the Jacksonville area like telehealth appointments.

Ms. Johnson said they will continue to engage in telehealth services for appointments as long as they are able to do so because it works for their schedule and mental health.

"Lucas" is a father of two children in the Daytona area. "Telehealth is more convenient to me because there would be several sessions that I would have to miss due to work but instead I am able to video chat with my team while I am working in a different county. To be completely honest, I felt more willing to open up to my team in the beginning through video because I get a little nervous when meeting face-to-face."

"Stacy" in the Lakeland area said telehealth "has allowed me to come to groups more often, every day, actually more than before COVID-19."