

Updates, Resources & Responses to COVID-19 in Wisconsin

To: District PPE Chairs

ForwardHealth, is part of the State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services and provides programming for many Health Programs to include; BadgerCare Plus, Nutritional Services, WI. Medicaid, along with other Programs with the goal of improving health outcomes for Wisconsin citizens and creating efficiencies for Health Care Providers.

The recent March, 2020 Publication of ForwardHealth addressed the temporary and permanent changes to Telehealth Policy, to begin on March 12, 2020 and to be in effect only during the public health emergency declared under Governor Evers Executive Order 72. Under the Order, Wisconsin Medicaid will allow remote services utilizing real time technology to include audio-only phone communication for services that can be delivered with “functional equivalency” to the face-to-face service. Recent concerns for individual privacy under the HIPPA Act of 1996 and its penalties have been set aside during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Providers may use any non-public facing remote communication product, but Not Public-facing applications like Facebook.

Wisconsin Department of health Services does intend to update Telehealth Policy after expiry of the Executive order. Following are Permanent Policy changes; Individual mental health and substance abuse practitioner’s services in settings other than those certified by the Department of Quality Assurance may be reimbursed for telehealth services. Further, individual practitioners of mental health and substance abuse not practicing in a facility certified by the division of Quality Assurance may also be reimbursed for telehealth services. These changes are not limited to the COVID-19 Health Emergency time period.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), has provided Federal support for the above Telehealth benefits by expanding this benefit on a temporary and emergency basis under the 1135 waiver of authority and Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act. Prior to this “waiver”, Medicare could only pay for telehealth on a limited basis; when the person receiving the service is in a designated rural area and when they leave their home and go to a clinic, hospital, or certain other types of medical facilities for the service.

In the April 7, 2020 memo from WHA to the Wisconsin State Legislature, Eric Borgerding, WHA President/CEO offered support to the Telehealth Parity-LRB 5920/P2, Section 65 provision. He did, however, express concern that the language in the bill may not allow all providers within the insurers’ network to provide paid for telehealth services, and be modified. The language he suggested: “No disability insurance policy or self-insured health plan may deny coverage and payment for any covered health care treatment or service rendered via telehealth by and in-network provider to at patient if the same treatment or service is covered if rendered face-to-face by the in-network provider.”

The recent request by Governor Evers for \$20 million in additional broadband funding to support Telemedicine will, by current estimates, fall woefully short and leave over 400,000 Wisconsin residents without this important service. Much more commitment and work needs to be done here.

I trust the forgoing summary will offer some clarification and assurances that positive temporary and permanent steps have been taken at both State and Federal levels to make this critically important Telehealth benefit available. Please forward to your Local PPE Chairs for their use.

Respectfully Submitted by; Bill McCullough, PPE Chair, Partners of WHA

