

A comparison of policy barriers pre and post COVID-19 onset for FQHCs delivering MAT services via telehealth

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Abstract

Before COVID-19, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and providers faced a myriad of barriers utilizing telehealth as a method to treat patients for substance use disorder (SUD). Patients with SUD can receive medication-assisted treatment (MAT). Despite MAT being considered the gold standard of treatment by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), only 10% of patients requiring treatment have access to care. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, FQHCs implementing programs to increase access to MAT through telehealth encountered barriers such as reimbursement requirements and regulations that restricted its use. With the declaration of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), how healthcare was delivered changed, and telehealth emerged to the forefront. COVID-19 policy changes eliminated some of the barriers that prevented the use of telehealth services to treat SUD through MAT. This study examines policy barriers FQHCs faced with implementing telehealth MAT programs before COVID-19 in five states with high mortality rates from opioid use and received grants to address the opioid epidemic from the federal Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA). A secondary analysis was conducted during the COVID-19 PHE to examine if/how the policy barriers had changed for FQHCs implementing telehealth MAT programs. With many of the barriers removed, FQHCs could now implement and offer telehealth MAT programs. Although access to services has increased, most telehealth policy expansions will only last while the PHE exists. Additionally, other issues such as broadband access as well as accessibility for disabled populations remain.

Biography:

Christine Calouro joined the Center for Connected Health Policy in October 2012. She assists with the project coordination of the National Telehealth Policy Resource Center, provides policy technical assistance on a nationwide basis and assists in policy analysis and tracking. She is co-author of CCHP's 50 State Report on Telehealth Laws, Regulations and Medicaid Policies. Ms. Calouro holds a master's degree in international relations from San Francisco State University.

Speaker Publications:

1. "State Occupational and Physical Therapy Telehealth Laws and Regulations: A 50-State Survey"
2. "The Federally Funded Telehealth Resource Centers"
3. "An Analysis Of State Telehealth Laws And Regulations For Occupational Therapy And Physical Therapy"

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