

TO: Special Committee on Health

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Serving: (Allen, Anderson, Linn, Bourbon, Neosho & Woodson Counties)

RE: Telehealth

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Purpose

Advocate for telehealth parity

Telehealth Benefits

Telehealth services promotes the following benefits:

1. Improved access to treatment;
2. High quality healthcare coverage; and
3. Reduces avoidable hospital admissions and healthcare costs.

1. Improved Access to Treatment by:

- a. Reducing long distance travel for consumers and providers;
- b. Increasing provider's treatment scheduling capacity; and
- c. Decreasing consumers wait times and cancellations regarding scheduled appointments.

For example, Southeast Kansas Mental Health Center (SEKMHC) provides a combination of televideo and face-to-face psychiatry, therapy, and crisis intervention services across its rural, six-county area. Without this telehealth capability, consumers' outpatient behavioral healthcare needs go unmet due to numerous long distance travel barriers (e.g., time, cost, transportation availability, etc.).

SEKMHC serves a rural and frontier Healthcare Provider Shortage Area. All of our psychiatry providers live outside of our catchment area and have a 3 to 4 hour round trip commute to work. Thus, blocking essential service time to travel to remote clinics would further compromise our ability to meet our consumers and communities outpatient psychiatric needs. Fortunately, telehealth allows us to provide efficient and effective psychiatric treatment to consumers in a timely and satisfactory manner.

Telehealth Crisis assessments and care management provided by SEKMHC has also greatly improved access to crisis services for our consumers and collaborating community partners (e.g., hospitals, health clinics, law enforcement, etc.). We provide 24/7 crisis services to include after-hours telehealth crisis therapy, which produces timely and supportive access to our treatment. Consumers in crisis, their natural supports and our referring community partners all share in the benefit of this service. Naturally, when there is a need for face-to-face intervention, we provide that accordingly.

Reduction on canceled appointments is another benefit of telehealth. Both consumers and providers alike are better able to attend to their scheduled appointment when other barriers or

unforeseen circumstances might have otherwise resulted in cancelled appointments. For example, inclement weather or personal hardships might prevent a providers long distance travel to a remote clinic. Fortunately, the capability to instead provide a telehealth service in those situations prevents cancelled appointment, allowing the consumers' needs to be met in a reliable and satisfactory way.

2. Improves High Quality Healthcare Services by:

- a. Enhancing recruitment and retention of high quality and experienced providers;
- b. Promoting quality integrated healthcare services; and
- c. Producing quality health outcomes.

Recruitment and retention of quality and experienced Providers is far more achievable with the application of telehealth when or where needed. Telehealth lessens or removes barriers to treatment, thus better meeting the needs of our consumers while increasing the satisfaction and retention of our providers. This allows us to more consistently meet community needs and provide higher quality services. For example, a 20+ year SEKMHC Therapist moved out of state last year, yet we successfully retained her highly valued and quality therapy services via telehealth.

Integrated healthcare and heightened care coordination is also promoted via telehealth services. SEKMHCs collaborative relationships with our community partners is an impressive example. Because we are able to provide timely telehealth services, community partners are better able to secure and coordinate our therapy services in a timely and supportive way, enhancing the likelihood of consumers following through with medically necessary treatment.

Improved health outcomes is greatly supported by telehealth. For example, SEKMHCs telehealth crisis therapy is timely treatment that meets consumers' needs where they are while supporting them where they want and need to be. This better promotes reduction of symptoms and health improvements necessary to fulfill their personal, family, educational, career, and life goals.

3. Telehealth reduces unnecessary hospitalizations and treatment costs. As previously indicated, telehealth psychiatry, therapy and crisis intervention services provided by SEKMHC have proven highly successful in meeting our consumers outpatient treatment needs while preventing far more costly and restrictive inpatient treatment. For example, regarding our crisis therapy assessments, we divert nearly sixty percent of all consumers we assess that are referred to us to evaluate their inpatient admission needs. In these cases, we successfully identify, develop and procure family, community, and professional outpatient services that supports consumers immediate and ongoing treatment needs.

Reducing healthcare costs are also a significant benefit made possible by efficient and effective telehealth services. consumers, insurance companies and tax payers all experience cost savings when efficient and effective telehealth services are provided.

In Summary, Telehealth offers consumers the right service in the right place at the right time! Telehealth promotes quality treatment, integrated care coordination and continuity of services that improve health outcomes and support sustainable care. Therefore, we appreciate your consideration and support of an essential healthcare parity measure.