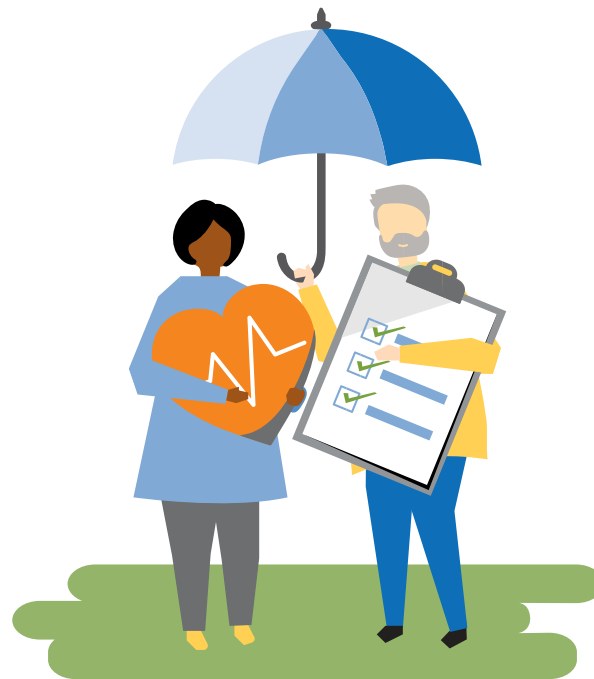


Telebehavioral Health: What Patients Should Know Before a Virtual Mental Health Visit

Patient Handout





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ABOUT CTRC

The California Telehealth Resource Center (CTRC) offers no-cost, unbiased training, educational resources, and technical assistance to help California providers and patients get the most from telehealth. As the federally designated telehealth resource center for the region, we offer unbiased tools and services based upon proven telehealth practices. We create lasting change and improvement by focusing on implementation, sustainability, reimbursement and policy, integration, workflows, and patient/provider adoption.

As part of the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers and the OCHIN family of companies, CTRC assists thousands of providers and patients annually. We have extensive experience supporting the healthcare safety net, rural and urban providers, and patients and families throughout California who would otherwise be unable to access quality healthcare due to geographic isolation, language/cultural barriers, lack of insurance, disability, homelessness, and more.



Telebehavioral Health: What Patients Should Know Before a Virtual Mental Health Visit

Telebehavioral health allows you to connect with mental health providers such as therapists, counselors, psychiatrists, or other behavioral health specialists using video or phone visits. Virtual care can make it easier to access support, especially when transportation, distance, work schedules, childcare, illness, or mobility challenges make in-person visits difficult.

Telebehavioral health may be used for:

- Therapy or counseling visits
- Medication management
- Psychiatric evaluations
- Group therapy or peer support sessions
- Crisis support or brief check-ins
- Anxiety, depression, stress, or trauma support
- Substance use disorder services
- Care coordination and ongoing support

Many patients find telehealth more convenient and easier to fit into daily life. For some people, virtual visits also improve consistency of care and reduce missed appointments.



Before Your Visit

Prepare Your Space

- Try to find a quiet, private place where you feel safe and comfortable speaking openly.
- Use headphones if privacy is limited.
- If you do not have a private space, ask your clinic if they can help identify alternatives.

Check Your Technology

- Charge your phone, tablet, or computer before the visit.
- Test your internet connection if using video.
- If using a tablet or computer, keep your phone nearby in case the video connection fails and the provider needs to call you.
- Ask your provider how you will receive the appointment link (email, text, or patient portal) and when to expect it.
- Download any required apps or software before your visit.
- Test the link a few minutes before your appointment to make sure it works.

Plan for Communication Needs

- Ask for an interpreter, captions, or other accessibility support before your appointment if needed.
- Let your clinic know if you are not comfortable using video technology or need additional assistance joining the visit.
- Ask if you can request a provider based on language, cultural background, faith, or specific care needs.

Know Your Safety Plan

- Ask your clinic:
 - What to do if you feel worse after hours
 - Who to contact during a mental health crisis
 - Whether same-day support or urgent appointments are available
- Keep emergency phone numbers easily accessible.

Be Ready to Share Your Location

At the beginning of the visit, your provider may ask for your current location and emergency contact information. This helps them support your safety if urgent assistance is ever needed during the appointment.

Understand Costs and Coverage

- Ask whether telebehavioral health visits are covered by your insurance or Medi-Cal plan.
- Confirm whether phone visits, video visits, or both are covered.
- Ask about copays or out-of-pocket costs if you are unsure.
- Ask your provider about any fees for canceling or rescheduling appointments, including how much notice is required to avoid charges. Check with your insurance plan to see if these fees are

Telebehavioral health programs should begin with a clearly defined operational problem statement.

During Your Visit

- Speak openly and honestly with your provider.
- Let them know if you are having trouble hearing, seeing, or understanding anything during the visit.
- Tell your provider if virtual care is not working well for you. Some patients benefit from a hybrid approach that includes both virtual and in-person visits.
- Keep water, medications, or notes nearby if helpful.

If You Lose Connection

Technology problems can happen. Before your appointment:

- Ask what the backup plan is if video fails.
- Make sure your clinic has the correct phone number to reach you.
- Stay calm and reconnect if possible. Your provider may call you directly.

When to Seek Immediate Help

Telebehavioral health is helpful for many mental health needs, but some situations require urgent or emergency care.

Call 911, go to the nearest emergency department, or contact 988 immediately if:

- You are thinking about hurting yourself or someone else
- You feel unsafe
- You are experiencing a mental health emergency
- You are unable to stay safe until your next appointment

24/7 Support

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988
- Emergency: Call 911
- California Peer-Run Warm Line: 1-855-845-7415



Helpful Reminder

Telebehavioral health is still healthcare. You deserve privacy, respect, and quality care whether your visit happens in person, by video, or by phone. If something is not working for you, tell your care team. They can often adjust the approach to better meet your needs.

