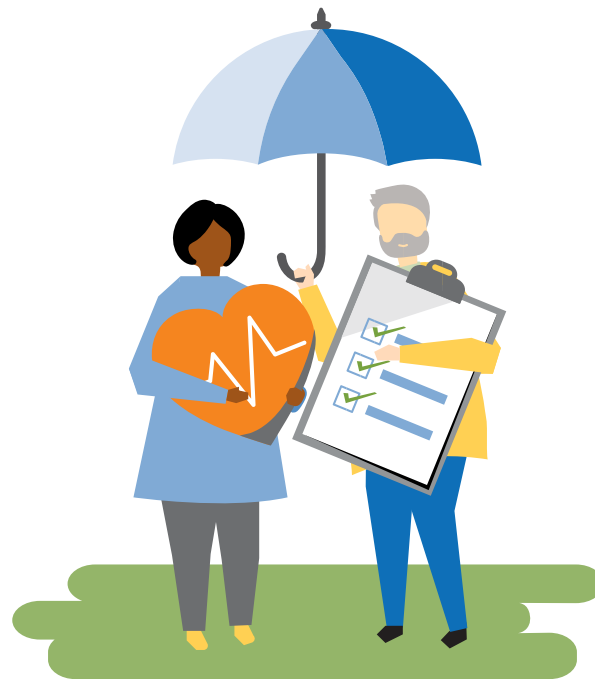


Digital Health for Opioid and Substance Use Disorder Care

Executive Quick Start Guide





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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.



Expanding Access and Supporting Recovery

Why This Matters

Opioid use disorder (OUD) and substance use disorders (SUDs) continue to affect communities across California and the nation. Healthcare organizations face increasing demand for treatment services while navigating workforce shortages, transportation barriers, capacity constraints, and growing behavioral health needs.

Digital health can help organizations expand access to care, improve continuity, strengthen recovery support, and connect patients with services when and where they need them. Digital health includes telehealth, electronic consultations (eConsults), remote patient monitoring (RPM), remote therapeutic monitoring (RTM), secure messaging, and virtual care coordination.

Successful programs require more than technology. They require thoughtful planning, strong governance, sustainable funding strategies, and a commitment to patient-centered care.

This guide provides healthcare executives with practical actions to support digital health-enabled OUD and SUD programs.

The Five Pillars of Successful Digital Health Programs

① **Access**

② **Safety**

③ **Privacy**

④ **Sustainability**

⑤ **Recovery Support**

1. Access

Digital health can reduce barriers that often prevent patients from initiating or remaining engaged in treatment.

Common barriers include:

- Limited specialty providers
- Transportation challenges
- Long travel distances
- Scheduling constraints
- Stigma associated with seeking care

Organizations should focus on expanding timely access while ensuring patients can receive the right level of care at the right time.

2. Safety

Patient safety remains the foundation of all digital health services.

Programs should establish:

- Clinical eligibility criteria
- Escalation pathways
- Crisis response procedures
- Follow-up protocols
- Emergency referral processes

Digital health should support clinical care, not replace sound clinical judgment.

3. Privacy

Substance use treatment services involve unique privacy considerations.

Healthcare leaders should ensure organizational readiness for:

- HIPAA compliance
- Security risk assessments
- Vendor oversight
- Data governance
- 42 CFR Part 2 requirements

Privacy protections help build trust and encourage patient engagement.

4. Sustainability

Long-term success depends on operational and financial sustainability. Healthcare organizations should evaluate:

Healthcare leaders should ensure organizational readiness for:

- Reimbursement opportunities
- Staffing requirements
- Technology costs
- Workflow efficiency
- Return on investment

Sustainability planning should begin before implementation.

5. Recovery Support

Recovery extends beyond individual appointments.

Digital health programs should strengthen connections to:

- Primary care
- Behavioral health services
- Peer recovery programs
- Harm reduction services
- Community resources
- Social support programs

Strong recovery-oriented systems support patients throughout their care journey.

30-60-90 Day Executive Action Plan

First 30 Days: <i>Establish Strategic Direction</i>	Define the role digital health will play within your organization's OUD and SUD strategy. Questions to consider: • What patient population are we trying to reach? • What barriers are we trying to address? • Which digital health modalities best support our goals? • How will success be measured? Identify executive sponsors and establish organizational priorities
Days 31-60: <i>Assess Readiness</i>	Evaluate current capabilities across the organization. Review: • Clinical workflows • Technology infrastructure • Staffing resources • Privacy and compliance processes • Reimbursement opportunities • Community partnerships Develop a roadmap that aligns implementation with organizational goals.
Days 61-90: <i>Launch Governance and Measurement</i>	Create oversight structures that support long-term success. Recommended activities: • Establish governance committees • Approve policies and procedures • Develop performance dashboards • Define quality metrics • Implement staff education plans Measurement should begin immediately and continue throughout the program lifecycle.

Does Digital Health Work?

Research demonstrates that telehealth and other digital health services can improve access to substance use disorder treatment, particularly for patients who experience transportation barriers or limited access to specialty care.

Potential benefits include:

Faster access to treatment	Better care coordination	Improved patient engagement
Increased continuity of care	Expanded access to specialty expertise	Reduced missed appointments

Organizations should combine published evidence with local data to guide implementation decisions.

Executive Considerations for Safety and Compliance

Privacy and Confidentiality

Organizations providing SUD treatment services should review policies and workflows related to:

- Patient consent
- Information sharing
- Documentation
- Health information exchange
- Staff education

Special attention should be given to updated 42 CFR Part 2 requirements and implementation timelines. [Fact Sheet 42 CFR Part 2 Final Rule | HHS.gov](#)

Controlled Substance Prescribing

Programs supporting medication for opioid use disorder should establish clear workflows addressing:

- Identity verification
- Prescription Drug Monitoring Program requirements
- Documentation expectations
- Follow-up protocols
- Provider education

Requirements continue to evolve, making ongoing policy review essential.

Accessibility

Digital health services should be designed to support participation by individuals with varying communication, language, technology, and accessibility needs.

- Language assistance services
- Accessible communication formats
- Captioning when appropriate
- Alternative visit options
- Digital literacy support

Sustainability and Financial Planning

Healthcare leaders should develop a modality-specific reimbursement strategy before scaling services.

Key considerations include:

- Medicare coverage
- Medi-Cal requirements
- Managed care policies
- Commercial payer requirements
- FQHC and RHC billing considerations

Cost analyses should account for:

- Technology platforms
- Devices
- Integration costs
- Training
- Technical support
- Clinical review time

Organizations that align operational workflows with reimbursement requirements are more likely to achieve long-term sustainability.

Measuring Success

Executive dashboards should focus on five categories of performance.

<i>Access</i>	• Time to first appointment • Appointment availability • No-show rates • New patient access
<i>Clinical Outcomes</i>	• Retention at 30, 60, 90, and 180 days • Medication adherence • Referral completion • Follow-up rates
<i>Patient Experience</i>	• Satisfaction scores • Digital engagement • Technology usability
<i>Operational Performance</i>	• Successful connection rates • Workflow efficiency • Staff productivity
<i>Compliance</i>	• Consent completion rates • Documentation quality • Staff training completion • Policy adherence

Review metrics regularly and use findings to guide continuous improvement.

Recovery-Oriented Leadership

The most successful digital health programs recognize that recovery is an ongoing process rather than a single clinical encounter.

Healthcare leaders should prioritize strategies that:

Strengthen care
coordination

Support patient
engagement

Promote
continuity of care

Connect patients
to community
resources

Build long-term
recovery support
systems

Digital health works best when it strengthens relationships between patients, providers, and communities.

How CTRC Can Help

The California Telehealth Resource Center (CTRC) provides no-cost technical assistance, education, and implementation support to healthcare organizations across California.

CTRC can assist organizations with:



- Digital health strategy development
- Telehealth implementation planning
- Workflow optimization
- Policy and reimbursement guidance
- Technology selection
- Program evaluation and sustainability planning

Organizations seeking to expand OUD and SUD services through digital health are encouraged to leverage CTRC resources and technical assistance.

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