



What Is Telemental Health?

From the **NATIONAL INSTITUTE of MENTAL HEALTH**

Telemental health is the use of telecommunications or videoconferencing technology to provide mental health services. It is sometimes referred to as telepsychiatry or telepsychology. Research suggests that telemental health services can be effective for many people, including, but not limited to those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.

As the need for providing virtual mental health care services has increased, providers are finding ways to use phone and videoconferencing technology to bring therapy, evaluations, interventions, and medication management to individuals where they are.

Although the practice has become much more common, especially as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, more research is needed to understand when and how telemental health services should be used.

Learn about factors to consider when using telemental health.

Potential Benefits

- ▶ **Convenience:** Telemental health appointments don't require travel and often mean less time off work and smoother logistics coordination for things like transportation or childcare. Patients also can schedule appointments with less advance notice and at more flexible hours.
- ▶ **Broader reach:** The technology is available to people who may not have had access to mental health services previously, including those in remote areas and emergency care situations.
- ▶ **Fewer barriers:** For those who may have been hesitant to look for mental health care in the past, telemental health services might be an easier first step than traditional mental health services.
- ▶ **Advances in technology:** As telemental health services have increased, providers have become more familiar with evolving videoconferencing technology, with some switching to entirely virtual practices.

Potential Drawbacks

- ▶ **Access to technology:** Services may be limited by lack of internet connection and devices.
- ▶ **Quality issues:** Varying levels of technological quality can affect how services are provided and received.
- ▶ **Cost:** Evolving technology means updating equipment, platforms, and networks for patients.
- ▶ **Privacy:** Cameras in users' homes and virtual online platforms pose privacy considerations. Individuals also might be more hesitant to share sensitive personal information with a provider in a situation where others might hear.
- ▶ **Insurance coverage:** The rise in telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to policy changes to make services accessible to more people. However, it is not known how long such flexibilities will stay in place, and understanding what services are available can be complicated. Coverage and provider licensure requirements vary from state to state.



If you are in immediate distress or are thinking about hurting yourself, call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** toll-free at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the toll-free TTY number at 1-800-799-4TTY (4889). You also can text the **Crisis Text Line** (HELLO to 741741) or go to the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** website at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>.

Finding a Telemental Health Services Provider

Many of the same considerations for finding a provider for in-person mental health services apply to finding a telemental health services provider. Considerations specific to telemental health include:

- ▶ **Security:** As videoconferencing platforms continue to evolve, most providers use secure platforms through which recording isn't possible. Industry best practices for videoconferencing for telemental health services providers suggest selecting platforms with appropriate verification, confidentiality, and security features.
- ▶ **Introductory sessions:** Meeting a provider for the first time in a virtual environment may make it more challenging to determine comfort level. Initial free consultations may make it easier to determine if a telemental health services provider feels like a good fit.

Learn more about getting help and finding a health care provider on the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) website at www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>. Use this online tool to help you find mental health services in your area and to learn whether providers offer telemental health services.



More Resources

- ▶ MedlinePlus: Telehealth (<https://medlineplus.gov/telehealth.html>)
- ▶ Department of Health and Human Services: Telehealth (<https://www.telehealth.hhs.gov>)

