



Starting Your Telemental Health Practice



Acknowledgements

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What's in the Telemental Health Package?

The practice of psychology via videoconferencing involves consideration of legal requirements, ethical standards, telecommunication technologies, intra- and interagency policies, and other external constraints, as well as the demands of the particular professional context. In some situations, one set of considerations may suggest a different course of action than another, and it is the responsibility of the psychologist to balance them appropriately. The documents and information in this package represent over 800 hours of research! These guidelines and sample documents aim to assist psychologists in making such decisions, while providing the necessary resources and steps to streamline the process.

Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA) is committed to remaining on the forefront of psychological practices and developments. Modern telecommunications technologies provide both opportunities and challenges for psychologists. Telemental health not only enhances a psychologist's ability to provide services to clients/patients, but also greatly expands access to psychological services that, without telecommunication technologies, would not be available. WSPA understands the need for simplified guidance to psychologists in this area of practice, the myriad of complex issues related to the practice of telemental health, and the experiences that they and other practitioners address each day in the use of technology. Whether you're an early career or established psychologist, a thorough understanding of modern developments in psychological treatment is critical.

Two important areas of consideration are necessary to fully and properly utilize telecommunication technologies for the purpose of telemental health practices:

1. the psychologist's knowledge of and competence in the use of the specific telecommunication technologies being utilized; and,
2. the need to ensure the client/patient has a full understanding of the increased risks to loss of security and confidentiality when using telecommunication technologies as opposed to a traditional practice setting.



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Telemental Health Introduction to Videoconferencing

You may not need to invest in additional video equipment depending on your current computer set up. Most laptops already have built in cameras, while many desktop computers will need the addition of a small camera. A headset or microphone will be required for a desktop computer and would be useful with a laptop.

Everyday videoconferencing solutions such as Facetime on Apple iPhones, Skype and other video applications are not HIPAA compliant.

The rapidly changing nature of videoconferencing applications and technology would quickly make a list of HIPAA compliant video solutions out of date. Video companies that claim their software meets the federal government's standards for privacy and security can be found on The Telehealth Institute's website at [this link](#).

Many commercially available videoconferencing products or options are neither secure nor HIPAA compliant.

Selecting a Product

- Consider investing in a product designed for healthcare
- Ask the vendor if they comply with HIPAA and/or HITECH regulations
- Look for products easy for you and your client to use
- Look for encryption, Business Associates Agreement, ability to manage contacts
- Try out multiple products

Clinical Considerations

- Which clients will you see (e.g., new, existing, types of care, diagnoses)
- What services will you provide via video (intakes, groups)
- Eye contact, body positioning, rapport building, managing disruptions
- Managing client technical needs
- Is the client able to operate telemental health equipment on his or her end (e.g., operate a web camera, send homework over secure messaging)
- Does the client want care via telemental health



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Washington State Regulations

RCW 48.43.735 (RCW 74.09.325 for Medicaid) — Washington State law requiring insurers in this state to reimburse providers for telemental health services. This law takes effect on January 1, 2017.

Insurers must reimburse if the service:

- is already covered as an in-person service.
- is medically necessary.
- is recognized in the ACA as an essential health benefit.
- Or, if “store & forward” technology is used.

“Store & Forward” Technology is a type of asynchronous transmission wherein the information travels from one site via an intermediate location that verifies communication before sending the transmission forward. Store & Forward also allows for transmission of scans and other diagnostic tests.

Email, telephone, and fax transmission are not Store & Forward and will not be reimbursed under this law.

The definition of “telemental health” within this law is quite specific.

Clients must be located at an “originating site.” Originating Sites include hospitals, clinics, provider offices, nursing homes and renal dialysis centers. Insurers are not currently required to recognize private homes as an originating site. However, in 2018, insurers will recognize services delivered into patients’ private homes as eligible for reimbursement.

“Distant sites” represent where providers are located. Distant sites include the same locations as originating sites.

Some providers may maintain a professional office in their private residence. This residence should be conducive to maintaining patient privacy and confidentiality.



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Sample Forms for Use in Clinical Practice

The following pages are forms you may use in starting your telemental health practice. These same forms are also provided in Microsoft Word to allow you to customize as needed.

The forms included are:

Telemental Health Emergency Plan

Telemental Health Clinical and Technical Assessments

Telemental Health Risk Assessment of Technology in Psychological Practice:
Equipment, Office and Personal