



OREGON PSYCHIATRIC
PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

Date: April 26, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair Deborah Patterson
The Honorable Vice-Chair Tim Knopp
Members of the Senate Health Care Committee

From: Maya Lopez, MD
Daniel Nicoli, DO
Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association

RE: Position statement on HB 2508, Telehealth Parity

Chair Patterson and members of the committee:

The Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association (OPPA), a district branch of the American Psychiatric Association, was established in 1966. OPPA serves as the organization for Oregon's medical doctors specializing in psychiatry who work together to ensure effective treatment for persons with mental illness, including substance use disorders, and compassion for them and their families. **OPPA supports HB 2508, which extends telehealth coverage and pay parity beyond COVID-19.**

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon psychiatrists and OPPA members reported they were able to quickly and effectively transition from in-person care to telehealth. The temporary provisions to expand telehealth have enabled many people to receive much-needed treatment for mental health and substance use disorders, some of them for the first time. It also highlights that telehealth for treating psychiatric disorders can be adopted efficiently, and that most barriers to doing so may have been regulatory in nature.

Mind Matters, a psychiatry mental health practice with locations in Hillsboro, West Linn and Pendleton, reported in the first three months of the pandemic that they were able to quickly provide ongoing care for medication management and psychotherapy as well as new patient evaluations by telemedicine. For April, May and June, 2020, their clinics saw a total of 4,526 medication management appointments, and 3,435 psychotherapy appointments. They were also able to conduct 134 new psychiatric patient evaluations and 64 new psychotherapy intakes. They averaged over 2,6000 appointments per month since the transition to telehealth, which was consistent with their patient flow prior to moving services online due to the pandemic. And as a result, NO providers contracted COVID-19. This is critical given the shortage of behavioral health providers in our state.

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Telehealth also helps to address the problem of transportation, which is a challenge for many behavioral health patients. Many patients miss appointments because of transportation difficulties or the need to take time off for work or childcare. Telehealth also cuts down on the number of people not arriving at their scheduled appointments; this benefits both patients and providers and reduces financial stressors.

For older patients who are unable to use video software and patients who lack broadband access or technology for video-only, the current ability to reach patients solely over telephone has been critical to ensuring continuity of care.

In addition, the OPPA believes that data collection should occur for care provided via telehealth so this data can be used to assess for equity and quality.

In comparison to other states' laws regarding telehealth coverage, Oregon's statutes fall short. In the state of Washington, Governor Inslee signed into law SB 5385 in 2020, that requires coverage of telehealth services at the same cost as in-person services.

We urge Oregon's leaders to similarly recognize how increased access to treatment via telehealth can save valuable dollars by helping patients avoid trips to the ER and subsequent hospitalizations. We have already seen the tremendous gains in access to psychiatric care and it will be even more essential in the coming months during the state's recovery period from COVID-19. Please pass HB 2508.