



## Tobacco Cessation, Telehealth and a Pandemic: A Changing Landscape

*Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States. Individuals who smoke are at greater risk of a more severe case of COVID-19, should they contract it. Helping smokers quit has never been more important, but because of the pandemic, visiting a provider in person for healthcare can pose additional problems.*

*The role of telehealth has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a safe way for patients, including tobacco users, to access healthcare while avoiding unnecessary exposure to the novel coronavirus. The expansion of telehealth includes using telehealth as a modality for tobacco cessation. To get a better understanding of tobacco cessation and telehealth, please see the Lung Association's report, "[Telehealth as a Vehicle to Support Tobacco Cessation](#)."*

### **Changing Landscape**

Due to the fragmentation of the United States healthcare system, coverage of tobacco cessation via telehealth will vary by the type of health plan. This factsheet looks at changes to Medicare, Medicaid and Private Insurance.

#### **Medicare**

Tobacco cessation counseling is a service that can be provided via telehealth. Emergency regulations have removed some barriers to accessing it. New, temporary flexibility in eligibility criteria will last the duration of the Public Health Emergency, absent Congressional action. The temporary guidelines include:

- Any Medicare patient can access telehealth services. Previously, only patients living in rural areas or areas designated as a provider shortage area could access telehealth services.
- Medicare patients can access telehealth from their homes (also known as originating site requirements). Previously, patients could only access telehealth from a provider office.
- Tobacco cessation counseling (CPT codes: 99406 and 99407) can be conducted via audio-only interaction. Previously, all telehealth encounters, including tobacco cessation counseling, had to have both an audio and visual component.
- Tobacco cessation encounters (CMS138v9 and MIPS226) are eligible as one of 39 eligible electronic clinical quality measures (eCQM) available for the 2021 performance period. Reporting on these measures allow providers to show they are providing quality care and receive full payment.

#### **Medicaid**

State Medicaid programs have flexibility to provide tobacco cessation via telehealth. However, state Medicaid programs can expand their cessation services via telehealth through state action and, if needed, use an 1135 waiver, that would last the duration of the public health emergency. Specific coverage will vary by state.

#### **Private Insurance**

Tobacco cessation coverage via telehealth depends on the plan and the state where the plan is located. Some states have taken action to require plans to cover specific telehealth benefits. Most major insurance carriers are covering telehealth services, but specific coverage varies by issuer and plan.

For more information on coverage in a specific state or to dig deeper into a specific policy, the following resources are updated frequently and can be helpful:

- Kaiser Family Foundation - [Medicaid Emergency Authority Tracker](#)
- Center for Connected Health Policy - [COVID-19 Telehealth Coverage Policies](#)
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services– [State Medicaid & CHIP Toolkit](#)

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