



**Iowa
Mental
Health
Counselors
Association**



**AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION of IOWA**
A Branch of the American Counseling Association

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Governor, State of Iowa
State Capitol
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

May 25, 2020

Governor Reynolds,

On behalf of the Iowa Mental Health Counselor's Association (IMHCA) and the Iowa Chapter of the American Mental Health Counselors Association (ACA), thank you for all your work and dedication to Iowans during the Covid-19 crisis in Iowa. Between these two professional organizations, we represent more than 1,400 licensed clinical mental health counselors in the state of Iowa. We, as licensed mental health counselors (LMHCs in the state of Iowa), appreciate your support fully funding telehealth in this unprecedented time. We wanted to share with you how the funding and flexibilities your proclamation has allowed have been, and will continue to be, important during these difficult times. As you know, the need for mental health services has never been greater. As in any other crisis, the peak need of mental health services is typically 6 to 12 months after the crisis itself. We are asking that you extend your proclamation related to telehealth services for Iowans.

Because of your public health proclamation 2020.4, Section 67, mental health counselors have been allowed to utilize telehealth in various ways, from various locations, with matched reimbursement for in-office visits. This has drastically improved the access to mental health services across the state. In line with the state and CDC guidelines, we believe telehealth will continue as an essential tool in maintaining Iowan's mental health in the time of crisis and beyond. Moving to the telehealth method of service delivery was swift, timely, and costly for our mental health providers; however, there was great support across the state and from your office to make this move. It has been a great addition to health care across the state. Benefits to Iowans from this proclamation have included:

1. Increased access to funds for providers across the state which have helped with: the need for equipment, data or broadband increases, personal protective equipment and supplies, and creating space for working from home while continuing to fund office or administrative expenses while some experienced decreasing caseloads in the early weeks of the pandemic.
2. Increased access to services. Clients from rural areas were able to obtain services from a distance that they may not have been able to see with barriers to travel present.
3. Phone sessions have drastically increased the amount of contact providers can make with their clients in need, especially in these times of isolation, heightened anxiety, and increased separation from others. These have been particularly useful for clients who do not have reliable internet connections or the equipment to engage in screen telehealth services.

Many of our clients will continue to need distance therapy services for various reasons such as age, immune compromised, co-occurring health conditions, working in high-risk populations, or having others they do not want to expose in their household. For many providers, it is in their best interest to continue working from home for their own family's safety and health. We have providers working in person as well throughout this crisis. Across these various types of service delivery, the mental health providers are attempting to meet a wide



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range of client needs. With this known progress made in the field of telemental health, mental health providers are asking you to consider the following:

- Requiring Medicaid and private insurers to pay the same rate for a service regardless of how it is delivered (telehealth payment parity which would also include phone only).
- Permanently waiving all site of service requirements, so that people can receive services at home, in school, or at their business, and practitioners can deliver these services from their home office or business.

Maintaining the equitable funding for services as well as decreasing the barriers to seek services are critical in these uncertain times. Thank you again for your dedication to mental health and support to the provider community.

Sincerely,

The Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association (IMHCA)
and the Iowa Chapter of the American Counseling Association (ACA)

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