JOINT LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Telehealth

Ben Money

Department of Health and Human Services

March 10, 2020

Telehealth

- **Telehealth**: Broad term for remote healthcare including clinical services, tele-education, tele-research, and other non-clinical applications.

- **Telemedicine**: The use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve patients' health status.

- **Store-and-Forward Telemedicine (Asynchronous Telemedicine):** Transmission of stored digital images or diagnostic studies across a distance for diagnosis or management of medical conditions.

- **Remote Patient Monitoring**: The use of technology to enable monitoring of patients outside of conventional clinical settings, often using portable connected devices such as wearables or smart phones.

NC DHHS Telehealth Goals

- Reduce barriers to access to health care

- Improve patient engagement

- Bridge gaps in rural communities, which face poorer health outcomes and higher rates of potentially preventable deaths

NC DHHS Telehealth Activities

- **Increasing access to treatment for substance use disorder:** UNC Project ECHO provides free virtual trainings to health care providers to expand access to medication assisted treatment.

- **Increasing access to behavioral health services for children:** Pediatric primary care providers can consult by phone with a child and adolescent psychiatrist through the NC Telehealth Partnership for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Access program.

- **Screening patients during disease outbreaks:** Medicaid added coverage to allow providers to screen patients symptoms telephonically during seasonal illnesses or during other endemic outbreaks.

Temporary Medicaid policy modifications to reduce spread and increase access

- Phase 1 allows telephonic access for patients and providers
  - Allows providers who are quarantined to still provide care
  - Allows vulnerable well patients to stay home for routine care
  - Keeps sick patients at home to receive care when appropriate
  - Allow for behavioral health services as well as medical visits

- Phase 2 and 3 will expand further with appropriate authority

NC DHHS Telehealth Rural Activities

- Creating statewide Telehealth Inventory

- Identifying telehealth best-practice models

- Educating internal and external partners about telehealth

- Piloting Telehealth in Community Paramedicine

- Administering NC-STeP Program with ECU to deliver psychiatry services in hospitals ERs and community sites

- Created new Telehealth Specialist position

Bridging Gaps in Rural Communities and Addressing Health Equity

In partnership with DIT, received Appalachian Regional Commission POWER Grant

- First-ever received by North Carolina
- Conducted feasibility study for existing broadband/telehealth infrastructure in 20 ARC counties.
  - Map of broadband and safety-net provider use
  - North Carolina first in nation to map broadband in this way
    - Broadband capacity
    - Safety-Net use
- Live interactive dashboards identify county-by county broadband
- ORH and DIT collaborating to build out capacity

NC DHHS Telehealth Workgroup

- Subject matter experts from across DHHS are collaborating to discuss telehealth strategies to improve access, address barriers, and make recommendations on policy changes

- Working with national experts including the Mid- Atlantic Telehealth Resource Center to learn from other states

- Weekly sub-committee meetings

National Landscape: State Medicaid Policy

- Exploring other states' policies for applicability in North Carolina to improve access to care
  - 14 states provide reimbursement for store-and-forward
  - 22 state Medicaid programs provide reimbursement for remote patient monitoring
  - 27 states do not limit the type of facility that can serve as an originating site
  - 19 states explicitly allow the home to serve as an originating site
  - 19 states explicitly allow schools to be eligible originating sites for telehealth services
  - Only 6 states have any kind of geographic restrictions

"State Telehealth Laws and Reimbursement Policies" Center for Connected Health Policy https://www.cchpca.org/telehealth-policy/state-telehealth-laws-and-reimbursement-policies-report

Path to Medicaid Policy Modernization

- Finding the right balance between fiscal prudence and the critical need to increase access

- Budget considerations:
  - Reimbursement for services delivered
  - Cost of modifying Medicaid system to capture new codes
  - Cost of expanding Medicaid audit services and capabilities to be alert to fraud and abuse
  - Reconciliation of special payment arrangements (eg. for FQHCs and RHCs)