

# Telehealth



Many patients find it difficult to travel to clinics, hospitals, or doctor offices for any number of reasons. Unique challenges or situations can make it difficult to receive traditional care, Telemedicine can be a great option for patients.

## Assembly Bill 415

The most recent legislation signed into law on October 7th by Governor Jerry Brown, California Assembly Bill 415 lifted the ban on providing healthcare services over email or telephone. Although practitioners may not be reimbursed for this type of care, it is no longer against regulations. “The Telehealth Advancement Act of 2011,” will make it easier for healthcare providers to use telehealth in the treatment of patients, especially in underserved areas of the state.

Specifically, it will remove requirements to obtain additional, written informed consent and to document a barrier to an in-person visit prior to using telehealth through Medi-Cal. The law will also eliminate restrictions on the type of settings where telehealth may be used and on reimbursement for email or telephone consultations.

In 2015, AB 809 revised the informed consent requirements relating to the delivery of health care via telehealth by permitting consent to be made verbally or in writing, and by deleting the requirement that the health care provider who obtains the consent be at the originating site where the patient is physically located. This bill requires the health care provider to document the consent.

Today’s technology dramatically improves patient access to specialty care and provides for interaction and training between leading medical professionals and their colleague in remote locations. Underserved areas suffer from acute shortages in medical, dental, and other related professions. Telehealth helps bridge that gap through cost-effective technology that greatly benefits both the healthcare providers and the patients.

## Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)

DHCS considers telehealth a cost-effective alternative to health care provided in-person, particularly to underserved areas. Telehealth is not a distinct service, but a way that providers deliver health care to their patients that approximates in-person care. The standard of care is the same whether the patient is seen in-person or through telehealth.  
(<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/TelehealthFAQ.aspx>)

### State Law definitions:

**Telehealth:** The mode of delivering health care services and public health via information and communication technologies to facilitate the diagnosis, consultation, treatment, education, care management, and self-management of a patient’s health care while the patient is at the originating site and the health care provider is at a distant site. Telehealth facilitates patient self-management and caregiver support for patients and includes synchronous interactions and asynchronous store and forward transfers. Telehealth includes telemedicine, store and forward, remote patient monitoring devices, telephone calls, facsimile machines (faxes), tweets, and other electronic health care communication between providers and patients.

([Business and Professions Code section 2290.5\(a\)\(6\)](#))

**Telemedicine:** Two-way, real time interactive communication between the patient and the physician or practitioner at the distant site. This electronic communication means the use of interactive telecommunications equipment that includes, at a minimum, audio and video equipment. ([Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website](#))

## Telehealth Resources

Information about Medi-Cal's coverage and reimbursement telehealth policies:

<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/TelehealthResources.aspx>

## Patient requirements

There are three things that determine who is eligible to receive telehealth care:

- 1) Physician must determine that a patient is eligible for this form of care by justifying that a physical exam is not necessary;
- 2) Patient must provide either verbal or written consent to receive remote care;
- 3) Controlled substances will only be prescribed if the patient has received a prior in-person physical examination.

## California Telehealth Network

To promote advanced information technologies and services to improve access to high quality healthcare focusing on medically underserved and rural Californians <http://www.caltelehealth.org>

## Medi-Cal Programs

<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Pages/Medi-CalDenti-Cal.aspx>

## Some Health Plans in California and their use of Telehealth

### Cigna Telehealth services are expanding

In September 2013, we began offering expanded telehealth services to Cigna customers in certain areas. By teaming up with MDLIVETM, a telehealth vendor for online and on-demand health care delivery services, we can offer these customers access to online video or telephone consultations with MDLIVE-contracted internal medicine, family practice, and pediatric physicians. These services are provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week (including holidays), by telephone or video from virtually anywhere. Health care professionals who are contracted directly with MDLIVE may provide their patients with a cost-effective alternative to traditional care settings. They can diagnose, treat, and write prescriptions for several routine medical conditions including cold and flu, ear infections, and allergies.

### Kaiser Permanente Advances Telehealth

In 2012, nearly 50 percent of contacts between patients and primary care providers at Kaiser Permanente took place over the phone or through secure emails. These are appointments that have supplemented face-to-face visits and have largely been preferred for patients and providers alike. We currently have remote primary care, neurology, virtual inpatient rounding, mental health, and dermatology programs in various stages of implementation.

### Anthem

In 1998, Anthem Blue Cross partnered with the Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board (MRMIB) to form the first statewide Telehealth Program in California. This program was developed, managed, and comprehensively supported by the health plan. **The program was developed to:** Increase access to specialty care in rural areas, improve timeliness of diagnosis and treatment planning, and improve quality of care.

### How do I access Telemedicine?

#### **If you are unable to physically access your medical professional or clinic**

You can ask your healthcare provider if they utilize telemedicine so that you can share and receive information and medical assistance over the telephone or email.

### How do I access Telehealth?

#### **If you need a medical specialist and accessing long distances is a problem**

You can ask your healthcare provider if they utilize telehealth so that you can access medical advice and information from a variety of healthcare specialists in distant areas.