

To: Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition (BFHN) home visiting program managers  
From: BFHN leadership  
Re: COVID-19: home visiting telehealth guidelines  
Date: March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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**Summary:** To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the Department of Public Health (DPH) remains committed to providing services in a manner that reduces exposure and transmission, to the extent possible, for the duration of this public health emergency. This memo presents guidance concerning provision of home visiting telehealth services to families served by agencies working with BFHN. The below guidance applies to the following programs: Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative, Welcome Family, Pediatric Palliative Care, Early Intervention Parenting Partnerships, FIRST Steps Together, F.O.R. Families and the Care Coordination program.

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that clients continue to receive home visiting services to the extent possible and that vendor agencies continue to receive reimbursement. BFHN is highly motivated to ensure that no one is left behind in these trying circumstances.

#### Telehealth definition

- Telehealth (sometimes called “telemedicine”) is the use of electronic communication and information technologies to provide or support clinical care at a distance.
- Telehealth provides an alternative means for providers to deliver a service, when clinically appropriate and consistent with applicable regulations. Telehealth is a modality of treatment and/or treatment planning.

#### Telehealth home visits

- Vendor agencies should follow all precautions, prevention and mitigation strategies, and checklists contained within the [Agency Based In-Home Caregivers & Workers 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance](#) posted to the [mass.gov/covid19](https://mass.gov/covid19) website.
- Vendor agencies should determine whether home visits are appropriate based upon the [Agency Based In-Home Caregivers Screening Flow Chart](#) within the [Agency Based In-Home Caregivers & Workers 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance](#).
- When indicated by the flowchart, programs should conduct home visits involving interviews, counseling, case management, referrals, and education via a telehealth modality where possible.
- Vendor agencies must notify BFHN of their intentions to implement plans for telehealth and/or a virtual meeting application service provision.

#### Telehealth modalities

- For the duration of the public health emergency related to COVID-19, DPH is not imposing specific requirements for technologies used to deliver services via telehealth and will allow reimbursement for covered services delivered through telehealth so long as such services are deemed necessary by a provider, are clinically appropriate, and comport with all applicable guidelines set forth in [Appendix A](#) of the MassHealth All Provider Bulletin 289, *MassHealth Coverage and Reimbursement Policy for Services Related to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*.
- Providers are encouraged to use appropriate technologies to communicate with individuals and should, to the extent feasible, ensure the same rights to confidentiality and security as provided in face-to-face services.
- Providers must inform members of any relevant privacy considerations.

### Reimbursement

- Rates of payment for services delivered via telehealth will be the same as rates of payment for services delivered via traditional (e.g., in-person) methods set forth in the applicable program standards or regulations.
- Programs using the EIM application to process unit rate and cost reimbursement invoices will continue to do so.
- BFHN understands that the mode of service delivery has changed and some elements of the home visit may not be completed (e.g. physical assessment); clinical notes should reflect these changes due to current circumstances.
- Vendor agencies must document in routine clinical notes that a home visit was offered via a telehealth modality.
- Via email to the appropriate BFHN contact, vendor agencies must provide a weekly summary report detailing home visits offered via a telehealth modality, including the following information
  - o The number of telehealth home visits that occurred that week
  - o The length of time for each telehealth home visit
  - o The nature of each telehealth home visit, i.e. interview, counseling, case management, etc.
  - o The telehealth modality employed for each telehealth home visit.

### Fiscal Impact on Agency

- Programs must inform BFHN of any fiscal issues encountered.