

New Laws Permit Telehealth Expansion

August 01, 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic forced many patients and practitioners to find new ways to connect. The most obvious tool is telehealth, the use of audio-visual platforms to allow practitioners to assess and communicate with patients remotely. Patients and practitioners both were encouraged by how beneficial and flexible telehealth can be. Federal and state governments alike are rushing to loosen restrictions to usher in wider adoption of telehealth tools. The 2021 Texas Legislature passed, and Governor Abbott signed, two telehealth bills that aim to provide greater access to care with telecommunication technology.

Senate Bill 40, which became effective on June 3, expands the Texas Occupations Code to make permanent certain waivers granted by Governor Abbott during the pandemic. For practitioners regulated by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR), the definition of “direct” patient observation now allows the use of telehealth platforms. It also allows TDLR to adopt rules governing telehealth services that are provided by its regulated professionals. The enrolled version of SB 40 can be accessed [here](#).

House Bill 4, which became effective on June 15, expands the Government Code and the Health and Safety Code to give practitioners more flexibility to use telehealth services with Medicaid, CHIP, and other public benefit program recipients. Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is tasked with implementing greater telehealth integration by the end of this year. Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) are granted greater flexibility to conduct assessments and provide coordination of care services through telecommunication technology. Rural access hospitals and federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) are also eligible for reimbursements of telehealth fees. The enrolled version of HB 4 can be accessed [here](#).