

Legal issues impact delivery of telehealth

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(HealthDay)—Telehealth technologies can allow delivery of high-quality care at a lower cost, especially in underserved areas, but there is currently no uniform legal approach to telehealth, hampering its

provision, according to a Health Policy Brief published online Aug. 15 in *Health Affairs*.

Noting that 20 percent of Americans live in areas with shortages of physicians and health care specialists, Tony Yang, from George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., discusses the use of telehealth and the legal issues pertaining to its use.

Yang notes that telehealth can improve access to health care in populations that are underserved, such as rural areas. Areas of concern about telehealth include fears of breakdown in the health professional-patient relationship, problems with quality of [health](#) information, and organizational complications. Implementation of telehealth is also challenging, with variations in physician licensure requirements and questions relating to patient privacy and reimbursement. Currently there is no uniform legal approach to telehealth, which hampers its provision, although incentives are encouraging development of telehealth, including through the Affordable Care Act. Concerns about reimbursement have limited the implementation and use of telehealth for private insurers and public programs such as Medicaid. Certain telehealth services are not reimbursed or are reimbursed at lower levels than in-person services, resulting in a decreased incentive to provide telehealth services.

"On balance, the benefits of [telehealth](#) are substantial, assuming that more efforts will reduce or address the risks and challenges," Yang writes.

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