

APA urges additional access to mental health services over phone during COVID-19 pandemic

3 April 2020

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing numbers of Americans are accessing their care through telehealth, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) at the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services has loosened requirements so that people receiving Medicaid and Medicare can use this vital link to health care. However, many of the most vulnerable patients, especially the serious mentally ill and elderly, are still facing obstacles to this care because they lack the required video technology or live in areas without reliable broadband access.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) today sent a [letter to CMS](#) to request that they loosen the video requirement for telepsychiatry to allow patients with older phones that do not have a camera, or who do not have [internet access](#), to receive individual therapy and medication management with their physician.

"We have heard from many psychiatrists whose patients are only able to call into appointments, because they don't have access to online technology," said APA President Bruce Schwartz, M.D. "Even if we can't physically see our patients, we can provide medication management and psychotherapy. We must be able to provide care to our patients in a way that respects current guidelines on social distancing. Now is the time for CMS to revise the rule so that all people with [serious mental illness](#) and substance use disorders can access the vital care they need."

"We commend the great steps that CMS has taken thus far to ensure everyone can access the care they need during this pandemic," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "Our recommendation will ensure that those patients who still rely on older technology can access vital psychiatric services."

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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