COVID-19 – Telemedicine/Telehealth Facilitation by Licensed Mental Health Practitioners

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) acknowledges the need for the continued facilitation of outpatient behavioral health services during the COVID-19 declared emergency. While individual therapy, family therapy and medication management were approved for telemedicine/telehealth, prior to the COVID-19 declared emergency, LDH is issuing approval for licensed mental health practitioners (LMHP) to conduct assessments, evaluations and testing via telemedicine/telehealth effective for dates of service beginning on or after March 21, 2020, which will remain in effect until rescinded by LDH. Louisiana Medicaid encourages and will reimburse the use of telemedicine/telehealth, when appropriate, for rendering LMHP and psychiatrist services.

General Considerations

Fully licensed mental health practitioners include:

- Psychiatrists;
- Medical Psychologists;
- Licensed Psychologists;
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW);
- Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC);
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT);
- Licensed Addiction Counselors (LAC);
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) with a psychiatric specialization.

When clinically appropriate, LDH encourages licensed mental health practitioners to facilitate services via telemedicine/telehealth. Telemedicine/telehealth does not exempt providers from any of the service requirements or record keeping as set forth in the Medicaid Behavioral Health Services Provider Manual. Services must be medically necessary. Additional record keeping is mandated for use during the COVID-19 declared emergency as described further in this bulletin. LDH will not waive licensure requirements for licensed mental health practitioners
providing services. Providers must also follow rules and regulations established their respective professional licensing boards.

When using telemedicine/telehealth, please follow these guidelines:

- Confidentiality still applies for services delivered through telemedicine/telehealth. The session must not be recorded without permission from the recipient or authorized representative.
- Develop a back-up plan (e.g., phone number where recipient can be reached) to restart the session or to reschedule it, in the event of technical problems.
- Develop a safety plan that includes at least one emergency contact and the closest emergency room (ER) location, in the event of a crisis.
- Verify recipient’s identity, if needed.
- Providers need the permission of the recipient and the recipient’s parent or legal guardian (and their contact information) prior to initiating a telemedicine/telehealth service with the recipient if the recipient is 18 years old or under.
- The recipient must be informed of all persons who will be present at each end of the transmission and the role of each person.
- Recipients may refuse services delivered through telehealth.
- It is important for the provider and the recipient to be in a quiet, private space that is free of distractions during the session.

**Communication Requirements**

During this COVID-19 declared emergency, LDH has approved fully licensed mental health practitioners to conduct assessments and evaluations via telemedicine/telehealth communications. Providers offering services via telemedicine/telehealth must use a secure, HIPAA-compliant platform, if available. If not available, providers may use everyday communication technologies, including audio-only delivery of telemedicine/telehealth services (e.g. telephone) or use of videoconferencing (e.g. Skype, FaceTime) programs that have reasonable security measures, with each recipient’s permission. Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, and similar video communication applications are public facing and must not be used for telemedicine/telehealth services. Audio-only delivery is allowed only in situations where an audio/video system is not available or not feasible. Although a combined audio/video system is preferred, LDH is allowing providers to practice telemedicine/telehealth through telephonic communications when appropriate. Texting and emails are not approved forms of telemedicine/telehealth. At minimum, there must be an audio connection. Providers must adhere to all telemedicine/telehealth-related requirements of their professional licensing board.

There is currently no formal limitation on the originating site (i.e., where the recipient is located) and this can include, but is not limited to, a healthcare facility, a school or the recipient’s home. Regardless of the originating site, providers must maintain adequate medical documentation to support reimbursement of the visit.
Assessments and Re-evaluations
LDH has approved utilizing telemedicine/telehealth for conducting assessments conducted by licensed mental health practitioners.

Psychological Testing
Not all psychological and neuropsychological testing is appropriate via telemedicine/telehealth. It is incumbent upon the psychologist/psychiatrist to ensure they are selecting and using measures that can be conducted appropriately via telemedicine/telehealth. There are a variety of measures that could reasonably be administered via telemedicine/telehealth (e.g., interviews, rating scales, surveys, measures of developmental functioning, measures of specific symptom patterns). There are other tests that would likely not be suitable for administration in any format other than in-person (e.g., many IQ measures). Providers must adhere to all telemedicine/telehealth-related requirements of their professional licensing board.

Documentation
Progress Notes:
Providers should record all aspects of telephonic and/or face-to-face encounters in the member’s clinical record, including, but not limited to the following:

- Name of recipient and any others present/participating.
- Dates and time of service contacts (include both start and stop times).
- Content of each delivered service, including the reason for the contact describing the goals/objectives addressed during the service, specific intervention(s), progress made toward functional and clinical improvement.
- Specific intervention(s) provided, including any units of service provided.
- Service location for each intervention. It must be documented that the service is being conducted via telemedicine/telehealth. For use of an audio-only system, the rationale for employing an audio-only system must be documented in the clinical record.
- Crisis plan, including any changes related to COVID-19 risks.
- Any new treatment plan interventions, goals and objectives related to treatment and/or COVID-19-related risks.
- Any referral of members to healthcare providers for further screening, testing or treatment of COVID-19 symptoms or history.
- Document a back-up plan (e.g., phone number where recipient can be reached) to restart the session or to reschedule it, in the event of technical problems.
- Document a safety plan that includes at least one emergency contact and the closest ER location, in the event of a crisis.
- Document verification of the recipient’s identity, if needed.
- Document the recipient is informed of all persons who will be present at each end of the transmission and the role of each person.
- Document if recipient refuses services delivered through telehealth.
• **Document permission from the recipient and the recipient’s parent or legal guardian (and their contact information) prior to initiating a telemedicine/telehealth service with the recipient if the recipient is 18 years old or under.**

• Name and functional title of person making record entry and providing service.

**Documents Requiring Recipient Signature:**
Providers must verbally review and discuss the documents requiring recipient signature (e.g. treatment plan) with the recipient/recipient’s family during the telemedicine/telehealth visit. The provider will be required to indicate the recipient/recipient’s family participation, if appropriate, as well as their agreement. The provider shall document as such on the signature line and in the corresponding progress note that includes the date and time of the meeting.

**Authorizations**
An existing prior authorization does not need an addendum to be eligible for telehealth delivery. Requirements for reimbursement are otherwise unchanged from the Medicaid Behavioral Health Services Provider Manual.

**IF** a prior authorization (PA) is required by the recipient’s MCO for licensed mental health practitioner services, LDH is issuing approval for **extending existing** PAs for services that reach the end of the authorization period during the emergency for the same duration as the previous authorized units until the end of the COVID-19 declared emergency. New requests should follow standard processes in place with the recipient’s MCO.

**Billing and Reimbursement**
For these services, the providers must bill the procedure code (CPT codes) with modifier “95,” as well as Place of Service “02” when delivering the service through telemedicine/telehealth. Reimbursement for visits delivered via telemedicine/telehealth is similar to in-person visits, subject to any terms and conditions in provider contracts with Medicaid managed care entities.

Providers should contact their contracted MCO for information that may affect billing procedures and reimbursement rates.

Claims processing systems will be updated by **March 31, 2020.** Before that date, providers should continue to submit claims, which will be recycled with no action needed by the provider. A list of relevant procedure codes is included below. Providers must indicate place of service “02” and must append modifier “95.”

Find a list of allowable codes below. Please see the [Specialized Behavioral Health Fee Schedule](#) for a complete list of modifiers and rates.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90785</td>
<td>INTERACTIVE COMPLEXITY, ADD ON</td>
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<tr>
<td>90791</td>
<td>PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSTIC EVALUATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>90792</td>
<td>PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSTIC EVALUATION WITH MEDICAL SERVICES</td>
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<tr>
<td>90832</td>
<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY, 30 MINUTES WITH PATIENT PRESENT</td>
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<tr>
<td>90833</td>
<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY, 30 MINUTES WITH PATIENT PRESENT, ADD ON</td>
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<td>90834</td>
<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY, 45 MINUTES WITH PATIENT PRESENT</td>
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<tr>
<td>90835</td>
<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY, 45 MINUTES WITH PATIENT PRESENT, ADD ON</td>
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<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY, 60 MINUTES WITH PATIENT PRESENT, ADD ON</td>
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<td>PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR CRISIS, FIRST 60 MINUTES</td>
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<td>FAMILY PSYCHOTHERAPY WITHOUT PATIENT PRESENT</td>
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<td>96105</td>
<td>ASSESSMENT OF APHASIA</td>
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<td>96116</td>
<td>NEUROBEHAVIORAL STATUS EXAMINATION, FIRST HOUR</td>
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<td>NEUROBEHAVIORAL STATUS EXAMINATION, EACH ADDITIONAL HOUR</td>
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<td>PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING EVALUATION SERVICES BY PHYSICIAN/QHP, FIRST HOUR</td>
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<td>PSYCHOLOGICAL OR NEUROPSYCH TEST ADMIN AND SCORING BY TECHNICIAN, EACH ADDITIONAL 30 MINUTES</td>
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In-person Encounter Requirements

IF in-person encounters between specialized behavioral health practitioners (licensed and/or unlicensed) are considered medically necessary, and IF both the provider/staff member AND recipient/recipient’s family agree that such encounters are necessary and safe, all providers and recipients are strongly advised to adhere to “DO THE FIVE:”

1. HANDS: Wash them often.
2. ELBOW: Cough into it.
3. FACE: Don’t touch it.
4. FEET: Stay more than 6 feet apart.
5. FEEL sick: Stay home.
Providers are strongly advised to limit in-person encounters only to those which cannot be
done through telemedicine/telehealth technologies. These in-person encounters must be
urgent and medically necessary. If such in-person visits are required for the health and safety of
the member, providers should contact recipients/family BEFORE going to homes or community
locations.

At this initial telephonic communication, the provider should screen recipients/families for
COVID-19 risk, exposure or symptoms, including but not limited to the following: report history
of or current temperature/fever, signs and symptoms of respiratory illness, and relevant travel
and exposure history.

Document the absence of any temperature/fever, shortness of breath, new or change in cough,
and sore throat prior to engaging the recipient.

Personnel who live in a community where community-based spread of COVID-19 is occurring
should not engage recipients if exhibiting respiratory symptoms and should be screened before
engaging in recipient encounters.

**IF** in-person encounters cannot be done through telemedicine/telehealth technologies,
providers should meet with each recipient/family in accord with CDC-recommended social
distancing guidance. While maintaining privacy, confidentiality and respecting conventions of
HIPAA and Protected Health Information, meet the recipient/family in open ventilated space,
staying at least six feet from the recipient/family member during the encounter. Consider
conducting the encounter outside of the home/apartment.

**Resources**
Providers may find more information about the coronavirus (COVID-19), including tips and
resources for healthcare providers, by visiting: [http://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/](http://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/). Specific
information for providers is located here: [http://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3880](http://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3880).