Background

Virtual care is the use of telecommunications to provide healthcare services remotely. Telemedicine is a subset of telehealth and involves the use of telecommunications to provide healthcare treatment to a patient. This innovative delivery method of healthcare can address the issues of provider shortages, access barriers, and vast geographical differences.

The Facts

- Many clinics and hospitals in rural and medically underserved areas lack a reliable broadband connection capable of supporting telehealth or electronic health record technology. These facilities require the broadband infrastructure or other methods of high-speed internet access, as well as good, certified electronic health record (EHR) technology, and an internet connection strong enough to support telehealth services.

- The expansion of telehealth provides access to care through methods such as eConsults, which are secure, web-based communications between provider and specialist to improve patient outcomes while allowing them to remain in their own community, as well as in home monitoring and virtual patient care. Telehealth can provide an enormous support system for chronically ill and elderly patients who tend to drive costs within the health care system.

- Telehealth can solve the problem of physician access shortages by virtually expanding provider reach into areas lacking sufficient services. It can also connect patients in need with distant specialists.

- Similarly, telehealth is geared to fight the opioid epidemic with emerging technologies such as electronic prescribing of controlled substances (EPCS), virtual counseling, digital therapeutics, remote patient monitoring, and collaboration of multidisciplinary experts to treat substance use disorders.

- Despite the availability of these virtual services to improve individual health, there are still some barriers to access, such as reimbursement. Currently, a number of states reimburse for live video or remote patient monitoring, but each state policy has restrictions, hindering development to improve care.

OCHIN Supports

- Enhance state and federal regulations on reimbursement policies, such as Medicaid, for increased telehealth service coverage to support those within the health care safety net.

- Increase federal & state subsidies and support innovative ideas to expand broadband access in rural and medically underserved urban communities to support connectivity to healthcare providers.

- Enhance value based care by expanding access to or creating new telehealth programs, and build virtual clinics to address disparities in access to care rural and underserved communities. There is a particular need for telehealth pilots focused on addiction treatment, behavioral health, and certain specialty care areas.

- Encourage creative collaboration to develop innovative concepts and technologies coordinating access to care using virtual care, virtual treatment centers, remote counseling options and eConsult services integrated into care coordination technology to serve the entire population, including the most vulnerable.

Questions?

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