



DATE: February 10, 2021 **COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations
BILL NO: House Bill 731
BILL TITLE: Telehealth Services – Expansion
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 731 – Telehealth Services – Expansion.

Bill Summary:

House Bill 731 puts telehealth policy extensions permitted during the public health emergency in statute, ensuring permanency. This bill eases restrictions on originating and distance sites; allows for reimbursement parity between in-person and telehealth services; permits the use of audio-only telehealth; and removes barriers to remote patient monitoring services.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger’s services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

Medicaid Services: Kennedy Krieger serves approximately 25,000 families per year, of whom a third are Medicaid recipients.

Telehealth Services: Kennedy Krieger Telehealth services include education, consultation, diagnosis, and direct in-home treatments. Prior to the pandemic, Kennedy Krieger had an established telebehavioral health program with demonstrated satisfaction and behavioral outcomes. In the six weeks leading up to March 15th, Kennedy Krieger’s 18 telehealth providers delivered 70 appointments (approximately 11 per week). Since March 15th, the Institute’s 585 providers have delivered over 72,000 telehealth appointments (approximately 4,000 per week).

Our Families connect with their provider through a secure, HIPAA-compliant web-based portal from the privacy of their homes. Necessary equipment includes WiFi service and a telephone, tablet, laptop or desktop with a built-in or USB camera. In April, Kennedy Krieger was the proud recipient of a \$994,950 grant from the Federal Communications Commission to expand and improve our telehealth services. The Institute has deployed this money by creating a loan program, loaning iPads, Chromebook, hotspots and other technology to our patients and providers.

Rationale:

The COVID-19 Pandemic has accelerated the use of telehealth and highlighted its many benefits. Emergency waivers from the federal and state government have allowed the health community to ramp up telehealth quickly and removed barriers that previously limited access. Telehealth has improved access to care, and we should continue these efforts beyond the pandemic. The behavioral and mental health effects of the enormous challenges and disruptions of this past year, and continuing into the present time, will outlive the pandemic with enduring adverse consequences for many Marylanders. Now is not the time to make healthcare less accessible.

In-home telehealth services are feasible, safe, efficient, and effective, and they allow families across the state access to the highest quality of services and providers available. For Maryland families with no access to care during the pandemic, telehealth has provided a vehicle to deliver high quality services. Reimbursement parity is an important component for the future of telehealth.

Telehealth increases access to care, makes services more accessible for families, and reduces travel time and expenses. Telehealth also allows therapists to see the child and family in the home setting, where the majority of the problems occur.

Evidence-Based Outcomes To Date (based on over 72,000 telehealth sessions):

Kennedy Krieger released a Patient Experience Survey to evaluate our delivery of telehealth between March to May 2020. Telehealth was provided across all disciplines including psychology, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, medical programs, and all mental and behavioral health services.

Over 2,000 self- or parent- reported survey responses were received. Parent and patient satisfaction was overwhelmingly high, with 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the telehealth platform was easy to use; 96% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt comfortable sharing information using telehealth; 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had an overall satisfaction with the clinical services received via telehealth.

In a dramatically changing healthcare environment, telehealth is a necessary tool to have available to utilize beyond the pandemic. Those at most-risk cannot afford to have a delay in care, and rather, should have every opportunity to access their doctors and health plan. **Kennedy Krieger eagerly endorses the permanency of telehealth extensions through House Bill 731 and urges the committee to provide a favorable report.**