



**Senate Finance Committee  
February 22, 2023  
Support of Senate Bill 534  
Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023**

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2021 - 2023**

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The Maryland Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD) urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 534.

Telehealth reduces the traditional obstacles that have previously kept individuals out of treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic provided substance use disorder and mental health treatment providers the opportunity to utilize telehealth services to maintain connection during a period of social distancing and quarantines with success. Stakeholder surveys from the Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) in the spring of 2020 and then again in November found that benefits to telehealth have included providing easier access to treatment and increased client participation in treatment. More recently, the Maryland Health Care Commission has recommended its continuation.

With the use of telehealth, providers can bypass obstacles such as stigma and geography challenges. Common barriers for engagement and attendance (transportation, childcare and travel time) are reduced or eliminated. The option of telehealth services allows consumers to create treatment schedules that meet their individualized needs.

In addition to treatment accessibility, telehealth appears to have similar or enhanced benefits to developing or maintaining the therapeutic relationship. Therapeutic connection may be preserved or enhanced through the use of telehealth, suggests a Maryland Community Behavioral Health survey<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, a consumer survey conducted by the Maryland Addiction Directors Council showed that 78% of consumers using telehealth had a positive experience either all of the time or most of the time. Specifically with the use of audio-only telehealth, 80% of respondents reported positive experiences all or most of the time.

When the public health emergency orders are lifted this spring, transportation and childcare will resume as real barriers to treatment. This forced experiment with telehealth has proved to be an effective alternative that provides the consumers with continued convenience and flexibility.

For these reasons, we urge your support of Senate Bill 534.

*MATOD members include community and hospital based Opioid Treatment Programs, local Health Departments, local Addiction and Behavioral Health Authorities and Maryland organizations that support evidence-based Medication Assisted Treatment. MATOD members include thousands of highly trained and dedicated addiction counselors, clinical social workers, physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, peer recovery specialists and dedicated staff who work every day to save and transform lives.*