



What You Need to Start a Telehealth Program



- 1) Define the **goals** for your telemedicine program – Conduct a needs and readiness assessment: Set clear goals with objective measurements.
- 2) **Engage** your staff – Creating telehealth service lines will impact numerous roles and functions within your practice. It is wise to involve all staff from the beginning.
 - a. Create a Telehealth Task Force that includes providers, scheduling staff, IT staff, billing department, and nursing. Bringing in the key players early will keep them engaged and bought into the program. Choose a staff member (or two) who can champion the initiative and bring the vision to life.
- 3) Become familiar with the regulatory and reimbursement environment for your state and specific payors. **Reach out** to your provider relation representatives to discuss what they will or will not reimburse.
 - a. Depending on the organization type and service provided, there may be a need to submit paperwork to be approved by your state agency that regulates your practice.
 - b. Review federal and state prescribing laws to see if there are any restrictions.
 - c. There are a wide range of legal and regulatory issues and requirements that must be understood and complied with when developing a telehealth program. Regulations and laws change frequently. Ensure your organization’s legal counsel is fully informed of your plans well in advance of implementation to allow time for complete legal reviews.
- 4) Decide what equipment (hardware, software, peripherals) will work best for your practice. Telemedicine equipment can be very cost-effective and **does not need to be complicated**. Involve your IT staff in this process.
 - a. Do you have enough bandwidth (both upload and download speeds) in your practice to support video visits without interruption?
 - b. Train and practice using the equipment with your staff – Run mock telehealth sessions within your office with all involved parties. This will ensure comfortability with the equipment and smooth out any issues before using it with actual patients.
 - c. Designate an exam room specifically for telehealth appointments. Pay close attention to room location, size, lighting, furniture, and wall color.



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- 5) Market this new service line to your patients – **Make them aware!** This can be through flyers or posters in the office waiting room, sending mass emails, or making video visits a point of discussion during every in-office encounter. Even if patients do not immediately schedule their next appointment using telemedicine, they are at least aware of the offering and its benefits.
- 6) Observe and collect **feedback** – How do patients and providers like this new service? What issues are they running into? What features do they like? What questions are coming up from patients?
- 7) **Evaluate** the strengths and weaknesses of your program on a regular basis. You can prove the value of telehealth by using a variety of different metrics. Look at metrics such as:
 - a. Encounters – Volume and type of telehealth encounters.
 - b. Cancellations and no-show rates – Have they improved since the implementation of your telehealth program?
 - c. Diagnosis – Which services successfully use video visits?
 - d. Cost per Visit – This can be useful in determining your return on investment over time.
 - e. Patient (and possibly provider) travel miles saved.
 - f. Quality measures such as hospital admission and readmission rates over time.



For more information on telehealth, visit the AHI Telehealth Technical Assistance Center:
<https://ahihealth.org/telehealth-technical-assistance-center/#about>