



Telehealth Deregulation and Payment Parity in Idaho Supports Patient Access and Safety

As the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) demonstrates, telehealth services for Idahoans, especially those in rural areas, are critical to ensure reliable and convenient access to health care no matter their geographic location. Between March-July of 2019 and March-July of 2020 mental health telehealth visits in Idaho increased from 117 to over 35,000. Other health care visits increased from approximately 400 visits to nearly 48,000.

Idaho's Telehealth Task Force studied ways to improve telehealth delivery in the state over the last year. The final months of this work came in the midst of the pandemic and therefore include real-time observations about the beneficial impacts of telehealth changes rapidly taking place in Idaho.



Dr. Boyd Southwick delivering telehealth from his Idaho Falls office.

The work of the Task Force must continue and concrete changes are needed through legislative action to ensure current momentum around telehealth expansion, which has broadened access to care for Idahoans, continues.

Legislative Action Needed

The Idaho Legislature has an opportunity to take next step towards improving telehealth delivery in Idaho by codifying the Telehealth Task Force recommended *Virtual Care Advisory Board*. The board would include legislators and focus on the following areas throughout 2021 to support telehealth integration, utilization, adoption and sustainability.

A Virtual Care Advisory Board, established by the Idaho Legislature, would:

- **Facilitate** collaboration between payers and providers with specific focus on reimbursement policies that allow for the continuation of robust telehealth.
- **Clarify and align** definitions associated with telehealth services.
- **Coordinate and streamline** regulatory and legislative mandates.
- **Establish** infrastructure to support the Department of Commerce's Broadband Initiative.
- **Develop** a process to further virtual care work force training, orientation, and communication.
- **Identify and support** community education needs.
- **Recommend** adoption or cessation of specific waivers associated with the PHE related to telehealth in Idaho.
- **Examine** how licensing issues around telehealth could impact the safety of Idahoans.