

# Centene Advanced Behavioral Health

White Paper

## Behavioral Health



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought telehealth to the forefront as an essential medium for delivering critical behavioral health care -- now and in the future. During this time, there has also been an unprecedented impact on the mental well-being

**T** **BH**



such as

transportation,  
childcare, and  
time away from  
work or school.

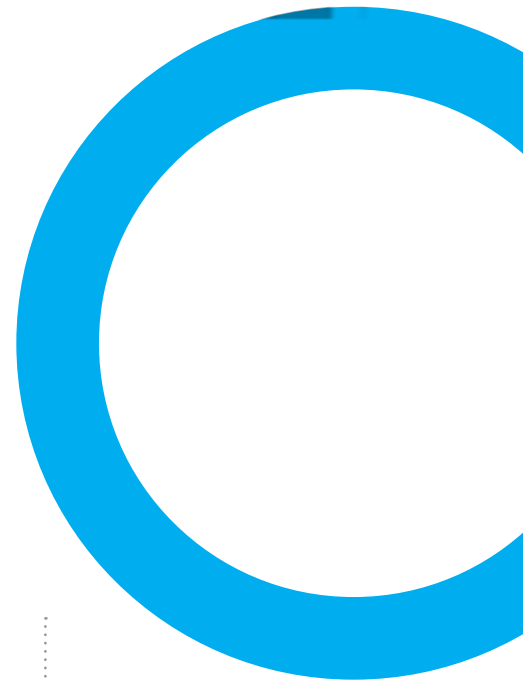
In addition to technology access, acceptance of and satisfaction with TeleBH services can also serve as barriers for some. A comprehensive report on children and adolescents' access to substance use disorder (SUD) services across the country concluded that satisfaction with TeleBH "is influenced by both pediatric patients' and their caregivers' access to technology, knowledge of available resources, [and] willingness to interact with technology..." which are, in turn, affected by "socioeconomic, educational, health, and other personal characteristics."<sup>5</sup> Understanding the factors affecting diactcnd04667 itr6d (c)1.

# Recommendations

## ACCESS AND QUALITY OF CARE

Because Centene is committed to offering accessible, telehealth services, it has and will continue to invest in accelerating the adoption of, and efficacy of telehealth services for both our members and providers. TeleBH has been a viable care delivery modality for member care during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be in the future. TeleBH can improve member engagement and treatment results, reduce stigma concerns, increase provider access, and reduce social determinant barriers. For these reasons, Centene and other payers can implement strategies to ensure high-quality, effective services are offered to members through TeleBH when this option is indicated.

- » According to the Eighth FCC Broadband Progress Report, access in rural areas remains problematic with 19 million residents lacking connectivity<sup>8</sup> and many more with insufficient internet speeds to support video calls. It is important for payers to join communities in advocating for better technology infrastructure in rural areas.
- » In addition to connectivity, members may not have adequate devices that allow for TeleBH treatment. Payers can look for opportunities to assist with this. For example, Centene has partnered with Samsung to deploy smart devices along with 90 days of free wireless service to providers, particularly in rural areas, to distribute to members so they can participate in telehealth services.
- » As more members choose TeleBH, they have access to a larger provider network to better match their needs for specialty expertise or cultural sensitivity. At Centene, our partnerships with national networks of TeleBH providers help augment locally available, in-person care. For example, Centene's expanded partnership with Quartet helps care managers quickly refer members to behavioral health providers in their area, for telehealth or in-person treatment.
- » Supporting the option for audio-only visits allows more members to benefit from TeleBH, whether by preference or need. While audio-only is not the preferred modality for TeleBH long-term, this could be used when audio/visual is not possible. Members may not have access to a video capable device, perceive video as being invasive, have a disability limiting their use of visual technology, and/or live in areas with limited broadband. Conversely, video and other options should also be available to meet the needs of individuals with certain disabilities, including hearing impairment.
- » Payers can monitor published and peer-reviewed research outcomes about treatments delivered through TeleBH versus in-person care. In situations where there is no evidence to guide TeleBH intervention success, payers should work closely with providers to co-monitor progress and adjust interventions.
- » It is important to compare quality measures of TeleBH services to those related to in-person treatment, understanding that some differences may be confounded with characteristics that drive the choice of TeleBH versus in-person treatment.



**90%**  
of behavioral health  
providers are



TeleBH can  
by reducing stigma  
or privacy concerns,  
increasing provider  
access, or removing  
barriers

### PROVIDER SUPPORT

Payers are in a unique position to assist providers and shape the future use of TeleBH while maintaining or improving access, efficacy, and quality of behavioral health interventions. Below are a number of steps payers can take to support providers offering valuable TeleBH services when desired by members.

- » TeleBH platforms may offer unique opportunities for providers to engage in measurement-based care by providing self-report progress questionnaires while members are waiting online for their session to start. Payers can promote measurement-based care in TeleBH to enhance treatment outcomes and more quickly identify when the current modality is not as effective<sup>9</sup>.
- » Although the uptake of TeleBH has been rapid, over-reliance on TeleBH for outpatient therapy and medication management must be avoided. There is some concern in the provider community that payers may turn exclusively to large national TeleBH vendors. Payers should reassure providers that when effective therapists can be found locally, they remain a desired option for members. Member benefits, such as access to specialists, should be communicated clearly with providers so that TeleBH is viewed as an enhancement, and not a replacement, to standard care.
- » Using TeleBH platforms that are integrated into electronic health record



## Summary

Telehealth, particularly TeleBH, has become essential during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be in demand in the future. Given this, payers need to determine how to use this innovative modality of care as a component in improving the mental health of those they serve. To truly impact members' total wellbeing, TeleBH must be factored into a payers' overall telehealth strategy. The significant impact that behavioral health has on physical wellbeing has been well documented. Further, payers are in a unique position to ensure the digital divide is not inadvertently increased, but rather technology is used to mitigate disparities and increase access for all. To ensure success, TeleBH must be enabled appropriately so it can be embraced by members, providers, and payers.

As a Managed Care Organization, Centene remains steadfast in providing value-driven care for our members, and being a strong partner to our providers for both in-person and telehealth visits through supporting appropriate expansion of telehealth services and elimination of regulatory barriers. Centene is committed to ensuring that all members have access to the care they need, and we will continue to work with our providers and payers to ensure that telehealth services are available to all members who need them.

