

TELEMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: TELEHEALTH TECHNOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The “Telemental Health Services” series explores the telemental health model, student privacy and consent concerns, technology and set-up, telemental health training options, telemental health in rural communities, and crisis response. Each guide includes practical tips, best practices, and information that is specific to the California Community Colleges setting.

This brief was developed as a series to help California community colleges implement telemental health (TMH) services within the context of COVID-19.

TELEHEALTH TECHNOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

This factsheet provides guidance on how to set up and deliver telemental health services. It includes an overview of the hardware and software components that support telemental health; best-practice recommendations for setting up a telemental health office space; and ideas about ways to practice your telemental health skills before beginning to see clients. Wherever possible, this factsheet provides specific recommendations for equipment and software that may help you deliver telemental health services safely and effectively.

How do I set up a secure workstation?

There are two options for setting up a secure workstation. If your college offers it, you may be able to work with your IT department to set up a workstation through the campus network. This is the preferred strategy but may not be an option for all. Recommendations and guidance for how to set up your own HIPPA-compliant workstation are also provided.

Workplace. Many colleges’ IT departments are able to configure a remote workstation that provides the needed safety and security to ensure student privacy. This would include installation of VPN, encrypted audio and video, updated security patches, and antivirus and malware protection. Further, the IT department can implement methods such as data encryption, firewalls, passwords, and authentication to protect the technology and prevent service interception.

Personal. If a personal computer is used, antivirus software and/or firewalls will need to be checked. The following programs are free options that can be used to determine security on personal computers.

- Windows 10 Defender. If you have Windows 10, Windows Defender Antivirus is already part of your operating system. [VERIFY YOU’RE UPDATED](#) (or [click here](#) to access the verify page)
- Avast. <https://www.avast.com/free-antivirus-download>

If a personal device is used (e.g. mobile phone), the most recent security update for the device should be installed. Settings that may need to be reconfigured for additional security include automated tasks that synchronize with other devices, such as email, contacts, phone/video logs. Where possible, it is recommended that personal devices not be used for professional use.

Data Storage. The Telebehavioral Health Institute (TBHI) recommends that information be stored on an external hard drive and not in the cloud to better ensure data security. TBHI also recommends hard drives, computers, and laptops be stored in a locked cabinet when not in use, and to take special care when traveling with the device (i.e., not leaving it in the back of a car, a hotel room or on a café tabletop when accessing the restroom). Many devices come with preinstalled apps. For these apps, we recommend changing the settings so the information is not stored in the cloud. If a computer needs to be serviced, hire a technician to come to your house instead of dropping off and leaving the computer at a store front. drives, computers, and laptops be stored in a locked cabinet when not in use, and to take special care when traveling with the device (i.e., not leaving it in the back of a car, a hotel room or on a café tabletop when accessing the restroom). Many devices come with preinstalled apps. For these apps, we recommend changing the settings so the information is not stored in the cloud. If a computer needs to be serviced, hire a technician to come to your house instead of dropping off and leaving the computer at a store front.

Other considerations relevant to data collection and back up of any information collected include:

- What types of information will be collected as part of the client record?
- Where will this information be stored? How will it be backed up securely?
- If therapists are using apps to supplement therapy, where is the information from those applications stored? Is it secure?

How do I test my Internet Connection?

Internet connection is important. Typically, you will need broadband internet with at least 20 MBPS upload/700 MBPS download speed to prevent pixilation, buffering, video, audio inconsistency. HD will require higher speeds. You can go to www.fast.com to test and monitor your connection speed for free. Open in a browser on the device you are using for real-time monitoring.

If you are providing telehealth in a semi-public space (e.g., hotel room, private library room) be sure to connect via a hotspot on your phone instead of the public network.

Connecting Students. During COVID-19 stay in place directives, several Internet providers were offering free Wi-Fi using public hotspots. As of June 2021, most providers were offering free or low-cost services for a period of time, then a subscription fee applies. For more information, visit HighSpeedInternet.com's article, Your Guide to Internet Service During New Coronavirus Pandemic.

What telehealth video platforms are available?

It is important to use HIPAA-compliant software to provide telehealth. This means that video and audio are not stored or cannot be intercepted in any way. If recordings are made, they should be stored only on HIPAA-compliant devices and systems. Ideally, the platform selected and used would include all tasks related to mental health services and documentation of services, such as informed consent, intake, progress and termination notes, and referrals.

Cranium Cafe software via ConexED

Cranium Cafe software platform provides students the ability to instantly join a face-to-face meeting with an advisor, counselor, tutor, professor, or classmate. Student services staff can provide online student support services through the ConexED/Cranium Cafe platform which is available to all California Community Colleges. The CVC-OEI can help facilitate training. Face-to-face appointments can be converted to online via SARS or other scheduling systems.

TechConnect Zoom Support for all the CCCs

Zoom is the most popular videoconferencing platform. You may already have personal and/or professional Zoom accounts, and be familiar with the interface. There is a HIPAA compliant version of Zoom that is available to CCCs. Some campuses may have already purchased this license. Contact CCC TechConnect at support@ccctechconnect.org to request the Zoom conversion. Therapists will be prompted to download a free Zoom app. Zoom shortcuts and tips can be found here: <https://youtu.be/UNxhkq9jjVo>.

Other HIPAA-Compliant Software

The following software and apps are also HIPAA compliant.

- Doxy.me
- [Google G Suite/ Hangouts Meet](https://www.google.com/gmail/about/hangouts-meet)
- [Skype for Business](https://www.skype.com/en/business)
- Updox
- Vsee
- [Zoom Healthcare](https://zoom.us/join)

Additional Platforms

During COVID-19, [Health & Human Services](#) allowed third-party apps if they are used in good faith to provide telehealth services. Any non-public technology may be used to assess and treat any medical condition. It does not have to be related to COVID-19. It is important for providers to notify their student patients that the third-party app may have privacy limitations.

The following apps are not recommended for telemental health: Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, or any public-facing applications. are not recommended for telemental health: Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, or any public-facing applications.

How do I set up my home office?

When transitioning to use of your personal space or home as an office, the set-up will be important. Ideally, the location would be secure, be free of noises and other people in the background, have a professional appearance, and use the right technology. The key is to avoid distractions yet also be comfortable.

Are there tips to create a space free of noise and distractions?

- To create a secure space that is free of noise distractions, you might lock the door, place a “do not disturb” sign out on the door as well as on the doorbell, and turn the camera away from the door.
- Audio, more than video, will be the critical component to providing telemental health.
- The right microphone is important. Considerations include quality, type of microphone, placement, speaker, and speaker location. The placement is important, as many mics, such as phone ear buds, may need to be directly in front of your mouth for optimum sound quality.
- Microphones can also amplify background noise. It may be useful to test what ambient noise the mic may pick up – doorbell, family members, traffic, neighbors, animals, etc. A white noise machine outside of the office may alleviate any distracting ambient sounds.
- Pillows, curtains, and carpets in your workspace can help to absorb sound.
- It is important to be aware of repetitive sounds they may make without realizing it (e.g., repeatedly tapping a pen, shuffling papers, chimes from incoming email) that may distract the client.
- When examining the space in front of you, it may help to identify what might distract you during a session. What do you need in front of you to encourage you, keep you regulated, or keep you energized? The space in front of you, it may help to identify what might distract you during a session. What do you need in front of you to encourage you, keep you regulated, or keep you energized?
- It is helpful to have any notes or checklists or other memory aids readily accessible.
- Other key essentials can be kept within reach, like a glass of water, glasses, tissue, etc. can be kept within reach, like a glass of water, glasses, tissue, etc.
- If your phone is nearby, it may be best to turn it to silent mode.

Speaker and microphone options:

- Jabra Speak 510 MS Wireless Bluetooth Speaker
- Speechware USB 3-in-1 TableMike
- Plantronics Headsets
- Your personal cell phone can also be used for live, 2-way interaction

What should I know about the camera and lighting?

- Testing the camera will help you to see what the patient will see. Visually, it is best for the space to be free of clutter (e.g., laundry, exercise machines, bed furniture, boxes).
- Facing the camera away from the door will ensure that your patient does not see someone enter the room before you see them.
- It is important to ensure proper lighting. For example, providers and clients may want to avoid sitting in a position with a light source behind them (e.g. a window or a lamp over the shoulder) or it will cast a shadow over their face. may want to avoid sitting in a position with a light source behind them (e.g. a window or a lamp over the shoulder) or it will cast a shadow over their face.
- If possible, go for two sources of light. Change the light source if the client is obscured by shadows.
- Consider virtual meeting backgrounds. Ideas include images of the office on campus, or similar décor, or a background image that is not distracting. Examples of office backgrounds can be found online.
- Be mindful of the glare from framed glass over photographs and art.
- When choosing clothing that is professional, but comfortable, it may be preferable to avoid busy patterns, such as stripes or polka dots.

Sample camera options:

- [For individual telecounseling sessions](#)
- [For groups, workshop, meetings](#)

How do I ensure client eye contact during telehealth sessions?

- Using a stationary chair will ensure that you don't rock back and forth.
- You can position your eyes 2/3 of the way from the bottom of the screen and take care with grooming as the camera may enlarge your face.
- Testing your virtual eye contact before seeing any students is often helpful. Find out what the student will see when you're typing or leaning forward and back, and practice holding yourself in an inviting position.
- Practice! The simulation of eye contact through technology takes practice. Rather than looking into the eyes of the image of a person on the screen, providers can adjust their gaze angle to look directly into the camera. Moving the image of the person as close to the camera as possible can help.
- Asking the client who is in the room with them at the beginning of each session can help you understand why a client may look away from the camera.
- Consider asking the client whether they can be heard by anyone in nearby rooms.

How can I be sure that I'm ready to deliver telemental health services?

- You might practice using the systems prior to services.
- The Telebehavioral Health Institute recommends identifying and developing processes and responses to a variety of scenarios that may occur, such as coping with a crisis, formalizing the start and end of sessions, maintaining start and end times, creating simple responses to curious comments about home or family life, or creating a checklist to provide structure and avoid your own distractions.
- It may be helpful to acknowledge that telehealth is new and challenging to both you and the patient. This could help you to acknowledge your mistakes when things go wrong. This could help you to acknowledge your mistakes when things go wrong.
- Technology can make even the most confident feel incompetent, and/or frustrated. Be ready to navigate these feelings in yourself and others.
- You can be clear that telehealth is optional for both clinician and client, and offer alternatives if either you or the client is uncomfortable (e.g. safety check-ins, phone support, providing a list of services in the area, hotlines). Clear that telehealth is optional for both clinician and client, and offer alternatives if either you or the client is uncomfortable (e.g. safety check-ins, phone support, providing a list of services in the area, hotlines).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Higher Education Mental Health Alliance \(HEMHA\) College Counseling Guide](#)
- [National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center - Clinician's Guide to Video Platforms](#)
- [Telehealth Best Practices for COVID-19 Training](#)
- [American Psychology Association Continuing Education in Psychology course "Telepsychology Best Practice 101 Series" by Dr. Marlene M. Maheu, Executive Director of the Telebehavioral Health Institute is currently free](#)
- [American Psychological Association Continuing Education Resources](#)
- [American Psychological Association Office and Technology Checklist for Telepsychological Services](#)
- [National Association of Social Workers California Chapter Online CE Program Telehealth: California Social Work Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)