

Governor Roy Cooper
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

Telehealth During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Governor Cooper,

The Substance Use Disorder Federation advocates for improving the lives of persons with substance use disorders through removing obstacles to effective services in the best setting for each person. Recently, major changes have happened to substance use services via the expanded use of telehealth. Telehealth has allowed community providers to deliver top substance use care amidst a pandemic that is currently causing, and will continue to cause, major behavioral health concerns in the months to come.

To improve access to crucial health services during COVID-19, several ad-hoc changes to Medicaid policy have occurred-- payment parity for services, expanded eligible telehealth technologies, allowing more types of providers to practice telehealth, and eliminating prior authorizations. The shift in billing rates for telehealth has had a positive impact. In addition, other insurance companies have followed suit and allowed robust telehealth services in the short term.

Nonetheless, there is work to be done. The lifting of stay-at-home restrictions in the weeks ahead should not be coupled with a reversion to the status quo. People who have experienced positive outcomes from telehealth should continue to receive these benefits.

We would like to emphasize that the racial disparities in COVID-19 rates are a warning sign that public policy, including substance use treatment policy, has much more to learn from the challenges facing communities of color. For too long, African American, Latinx, and Native American communities have been excluded from policy decisions impacting their own health and well-being.

We recommend that telehealth regulations for behavioral health remain unaltered while the state government can collect enough data to make an informed decision about best practices with input from substance use treatment service providers, nonprofits, and patients.

We thank you for your establishment of the new **Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental, and Health Equity Task Force** to focus on economic stability, health disparities, and environmental justice in North Carolina. We would also like to thank you for your establishment of the **Governor's Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice**.

The intersectionality of racial health disparities and substance use disorder cannot be overstated. The SUD Federation membership stands ready to serve as a resource for this historic task force.

Sincerely,