



## Telemedicine and Electronic Communication in Behavioral Health Services

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### **What Are Telemedicine Services?**

Telemedicine allows healthcare providers to offer services to individuals without being in the same physical location. This is done through secure video calls, phone calls, and other electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones. These systems are designed to follow strict rules that protect your personal health information (PHI) and ensure privacy.

Telemedicine services are not meant to replace all in-person care. Providers are required to meet with individuals in person periodically to update treatment plans and monitor progress. All telemedicine visits must align with the goals and services outlined in your Individual Plan of Service (IPOS). The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services provides a list of services that may be delivered through telemedicine.

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### **Possible Risks of Telemedicine**

While telemedicine is designed to be private and secure, there are some risks involved:

- Technical problems: Devices or internet connections may not always work correctly, and support staff may be needed to help.
  - Lack of privacy: If you're in a location where others can see or hear you, your session may not remain confidential.
  - Security risks: If your phone, computer, or internet connection is not properly secured, someone else may access your information.
  - Rare security failures: Although unlikely, hackers may break through security systems and view private health information.
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### **My Rights and Responsibilities**

Telemedicine provides access to behavioral health services using secure electronic technology. You have specific rights and responsibilities when participating in telemedicine or using electronic communication:

- You can stop using telemedicine at any time without affecting your right to receive care.
  - Your health information is confidential and protected by law, unless it must be shared due to specific legal reasons, including:
    - If you are in danger of hurting yourself or someone else.
    - If you report abuse of a child, elder, or vulnerable adult.
    - If required by a court proceeding involving your mental health.
  - No one is allowed to record telemedicine sessions. All shared information is confidential unless otherwise required by law.
  - If technical issues arise during a session, we will attempt to reconnect. If unable to do so within 10 minutes, your provider may contact you to reschedule.
  - Technology used is secure and designed to protect your PHI.
  - Your provider or the organization may stop telemedicine services if it is determined that it is not the best method of care for you.
  - If you do not maintain privacy during group sessions, telemedicine services may be discontinued.
  - All Michigan laws that apply to in-person behavioral health services also apply to telemedicine.
  - In an emergency, your provider may need to contact your emergency contact or emergency services for your safety.
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## **Emergency Plans**

If there is an emergency during a telemedicine session:

- Your provider will follow a predetermined emergency plan to make sure you receive proper care.
  - At the start of each session, you will be asked to provide your current physical location.
  - If the situation is life-threatening, your provider may contact someone who can come to your location or take you to a hospital or emergency room.
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## **Risks of Using Email or Texting for Treatment**

While email and text messages can be convenient, they carry unique risks when used to share private health information:

- Messages can be accidentally sent to the wrong person, shared, or copied.
- Without proper protection, emails and texts can be seen or stolen by hackers.
- Someone with access to your phone or email account may read your private messages.
- Even deleted emails or texts may still be stored somewhere.
- Communications may be printed and added to your medical record.
- Emails and texts may be used as legal evidence in court.

Before choosing to communicate through email or text, you, your guardian (if applicable), and your provider should consider these risks carefully.

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This document is meant to help you understand the benefits, risks, and expectations involved in using telemedicine and electronic communication as part of your behavioral health care. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak with your primary clinician.