



# TELEHEALTH STUDY

## *Overview of Study Activities*

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### BACKGROUND

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago was competitively selected by the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC) to conduct a telehealth study as required by the *Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021*.<sup>1</sup> As a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, NORC partners with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decision making. The MHCC has contracted with NORC to complete study activities that examine, in part, the impact of audio-only and audio-visual technologies in somatic and behavioral health interventions. More information on study activities follows.

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

**Provider Survey:** An online telehealth survey of providers on their use of telehealth in the delivery of care, including: 1) primary care physicians; 2) specialty physicians; 3) nurse practitioners; and 4) behavioral health providers (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed certified social workers, and other licensed professional counselors). The survey includes providers in rural and urban regions of the State (Baltimore City, the Eastern Shore, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, South-Central and Western Maryland). Survey questions inquire about access and utilization, telehealth technologies used (i.e., audio-only and audio-visual), and telehealth visits in comparison to in-person visits.

**Consumer Engagement Interviews:** Includes 80 semi-structured 30-minute telephone interviews with users and non-users of telehealth services across Maryland. The consumer interviews explore patient experiences and perceptions regarding access to and use of audio-only and audio-visual telehealth technologies. Consumers were selected to achieve regional-level representation across key demographic characteristics, including age, sex, race and ethnicity, income, education level, insurance coverage, and language spoken (English and Spanish).

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<sup>1</sup> The MHCC issued an Emergency Request for Proposals in June 2021 to obtain a contractor with subject matter expertise in telehealth and new models of integrated care and proficiency in conducting quantitative and qualitative research.



**Literature Review:** Identification of peer-reviewed and gray literature to examine the effectiveness of telehealth to deliver somatic and behavioral health care. New and emerging trends and policies regarding telehealth service delivery are also being reviewed.

**Behavioral Health Focus Groups:** Two behavioral health focus groups with representatives from provider organizations and consumer advocacy groups. The focus groups will explore experiences and perceptions of access and utilization of audio-only and audio-visual telehealth technologies.

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ACTIVITY

**Claims Analysis:** A statistical analyses of Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial health care claims data from Maryland's All-Payer Claims Database (APCD). The claims analyses explore trends in telehealth use from 2018 through 2021 across several key aspects of health care services, including the comparison of cost and service utilization for telehealth and in-person visits. A trend analysis will examine the uptake of telehealth services before and after the public health emergency. All analyses are stratified by patient characteristics, such as age, race and ethnicity, geography, and area-level broadband access.

## FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND TECHNICAL REPORTS

The Final Recommendations Report is based on evidence from the literature review, claims analyses, consumer interviews, behavioral health focus groups, and provider survey findings. The report will present MHCC's proposed evidence-based recommendations and supporting rationale for consideration by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2023 legislative session. The recommendations will take into consideration a chapter of the Final Recommendations Report independently prepared by the Maryland Insurance Administration.

The Final Recommendations Report will address the following telehealth policy considerations: coverage of telehealth services; payment levels for telehealth services relative to in-person care; other recommendations MHCC deems appropriate based on findings and evidence gathered during the study.

The Technical Report will include evidence-based findings and rationale for all study findings and conclusions. Telehealth topics will include access to care; utilization; and cost.

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More information on the telehealth study, including progress updates, is available [here](#).

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