

## **Federal Government and Best Practice Guidelines for Telehealth**

In an article titled *Telehealth Policy Is More Than Just Laws-Best Practice Guidelines and Guidance* the Center for Connected Health Policy advises that the federal government, through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued best practice guidelines for telehealth across various healthcare professions, including behavioral health. The relevant page for behavioral health providers may be found at: <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/telehealth-for-behavioral-health/>. There are also pages for patients and others.

The guidelines include the topics of: Getting started, billing for telehealth, telehealth and diagnosis, treating through telehealth and others.

Though these are not regulations they are outlines from the federal government of expected behaviors, procedures and practices in each of the professions named and should be taken seriously. The article goes on to say that both state and federal governments will most likely be issuing more codified guidelines, rules and regulations to licensees around the areas of provision of services through telehealth.

The article also mentions that various groups, such as the American Telehealth Association, have issued guidelines over the years for various areas of practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has issued guidelines for the use of technology, <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/NASW-Practice-Standards-Guidelines/Standards-for-Technology-in-Social-Work-Practice> , which means that its members are expected to adhere to those guidelines and, for our members, our Code of Ethics, <https://www.nysscsw.org/assets/code%20of%20ethics%202018%20final.pdf> , includes a section on the use of technology which is meant to guide our members' practice in this area and by which our members agree to be bound when joining and/or renewing.

Also, as a reminder about training in telehealth: the state of California now has a requirement as part of licensing that clinicians take a 3-hour course on telehealth practice. This is a mandatory course. According to Laura Groshong of the Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA) this is a one-and-done course, but who knows what the future holds. If California is requiring this can other states, including New York, be far behind? Training and certification is available from several sources.

Please take a look at these Best Practice guidelines if you are engaging or plan to engage in telehealth.

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