APA would like to acknowledge Lawrence Pick, PhD, co-chair of the Committee on Disability Issues in Psychology, and Tyler Pietz of Gallaudet University for their work in developing the content of this brochure.

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What Is Telehealth and Telepsychology?

**Telehealth:** The provision of medical care services using technological modalities in lieu of, or in addition to, traditional face-to-face methods.

**Telepsychology or telemental health:** The provision of behavioral and/or mental health care services using technological modalities in lieu of, or in addition to, traditional face-to-face methods (e.g., provision of therapy using the phone, diagnostic interviewing via videoteleconferencing, use of applications to track mood states, consultations via email).

**Synchronous service provision:** Communication in real time between a professional and a consumer.

**Asynchronous service provision:** Communication in a time-delayed manner between a professional and a consumer.
What Should I Know When Implementing Technology in My Practice?

- Laws and guidelines about telehealth lag significantly behind the rate of technological innovation.

- Check state laws and licensing board standards and procedures regarding the use of telehealth and/or telemental health by psychologists.

- Currently, 12 states mandate health insurance reimbursement for certain telehealth services. These mandates do not necessarily include telemental health services.

- Medicare and Medicaid reimburse for certain telehealth and telemental health services.

- If accepting third-party reimbursement, check with the respective agency regarding the extent to which they cover telehealth and telemental health services.

- Policies and procedures regarding technology implementation and use will vary by institution.

- As of December 2012, the American Psychological Association—with the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards and the APA Insurance Trust—has created draft guidelines for the practice of telepsychology. This document is under review.
What Is Important to Know About Technology and Disability?

Approximately 54 million Americans have a disability (sensory, motor, physical, cognitive, and/or emotional).

**People with disabilities:**

- Experience significant mental health disparities due to programmatic, sociocultural, economic, and physical barriers, particularly women and people of color.

- May not get appropriate access to mental and behavioral health care because medical and mental health providers tend to be unfamiliar with their needs.

- Have less access to the Internet, and those who do have access tend to have slower connections.

- Report owning fewer cell phones or similar devices.

- May use assistive (adaptive) technology or equipment, require assistive technology services, and/or require support from assistive technology providers (e.g., certified assistive technology professionals or rehabilitation engineers).

- May rely on telerelay or videorelay services to communicate.
How Do I Provide Telepsychology Services to Individuals With Disability?

- Assess the individual’s needs and the benefits and risks of using technology to provide services.
- Consider the products, services, and environmental factors required to provide effective telehealth services to the consumer.
- Familiarize yourself with the existing barriers faced by the individual with disability and work to remove those barriers.
- Consider the compatibility of phones, equipment, and computer-based programs used by the consumer and whether the products can work effectively with your service delivery.
- When using home-based or consumer technology, be mindful of the needs of your consumer regarding website accessibility, captioning, and assistive technology and equipment.
- Learn about accessibility features and functions on software programs and apps that you might use.
- If services are provided via a telehealth center, be aware of the needs of your consumers (e.g., access for wheelchairs and power-driven mobility devices, service animals, use of video-relay interpreters, use of assistive technology and equipment).
• Work with an assistive (adaptive) technology professional or a rehabilitation engineer if necessary.

• Note that some individuals with disability work closely with a family member, caregiver, and/or home health care provider. What is the role of this person, if any, in the consumer’s treatment? Consider the potential impact this may have on the provision of services.

• Develop a specific plan with the consumer that addresses emergency and/or unusual situations. If an emergency arises, ensure that the consumer knows of a local hospital, clinic, and/or professional equipped to provide him or her with the appropriate support or care.

• Increase awareness and skills related to cultural competency and linguistic sensitivity.

• Working with an individual with a disability? Unsure about their needs? Just Ask!
Is Telepsychology Right for My Practice?

Carefully consider the advantages and issues of concern when evaluating whether to add telehealth services to your practice.

**Advantages**

- Outreach to consumers in areas with few mental health resources or professionals trained to work with them
- Access for individuals with physical, medical, or mobility concerns
- Access to disability specialists regardless of geographic area
- Access to therapy in native language (e.g., American sign language)
- Help for individuals who may have difficulty going to therapy (e.g., because of posttraumatic stress disorder, agoraphobia, etc.)
- Ability to collect patient data outside of sessions
- Flexible scheduling
- Youth outreach
Concerns

• Effectiveness/outcomes

• Rapport/therapeutic alliance

• Licensing issues

• Portability and practice across state lines

• Reliability of technology

• Access to technology

• Lack of physical presence in emergency situations

• Informed consent

• Limited access to nonverbal behavior and cues

• Increased difficulty accessing appropriate services in local community in an emergency

• Increased isolation

• Therapist liability
Is Telepsychology Right for My Practice?

Other Considerations

Privacy and Confidentiality

- Advantage: You may be able to provide service to a consumer in a small community who may not otherwise receive services because of your dual roles and other ethical conflicts.

- Concern: Environment is not under your control. Consumer may not be alone at home, or session might be interrupted, overheard, or intercepted by a third party.

Participation and Engagement

- Advantage: Easier to attend sessions; fewer barriers (e.g., car trouble) preventing consumer from attending sessions; consumer is more engaged.

- Concern: Easier to skip sessions; sessions may not have same perceived importance as in-person sessions; potential hardware and software malfunctions; consumer engagement.

Cost

- Advantage: No commuting costs

- Concern: Cost and maintenance of equipment
Discuss the advantages and issues of concern with each consumer to determine whether telepsychology services are suitable for that consumer.
Where Do I Learn More?

ADA National Network
wwwadata.org

American Association on Health and Disability
www.aahd.us

American Disability Association
www.adanet.org

Americans with Disabilities Act
www.ada.gov

APA 50-State Telehealth Review
www.apapracticecentral.org/advocacy/state/telehealth-slides.pdf

National Center for Telehealth and Technology
www.t2health.org

New Freedom Initiative
www.hhs.gov/od/about/nfi.html

For more information or to receive this information in an alternative format, please contact the APA Disability Issues Office.