



Oklahoma Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

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April 16, 2021

The Honorable Charles McCall
Speaker, House of Representatives
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Room 401
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: Support for SB674

Dear Speaker McCall,

On behalf of the Oklahoma Society of Addiction Medicine (OKSAM), the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Oklahoma who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, we would like to take this opportunity to provide our support for SB674, which would dramatically expand access to addiction treatment by mandating that certain insurers cover telehealth. With opioid-involved deaths rising, likely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that Oklahomans have access to high-quality, evidence-based and comprehensive addiction treatment.ⁱ

OKSAM appreciates the inclusion of requirements that insurers reimburse services delivered through telehealth at the same rate as those services delivered in-person, as well as the prohibition of additional utilization review that is not required for those same services delivered in-person. Furthermore, this bill improves access to telehealth services by prohibiting deductibles, copays and coinsurance that are specific to telehealth, and not similarly applied to other services covered under the insurance plan. Telehealth can allow for more frequent communication with a patient's addiction care team, provide additional privacy, help address the stigma of receiving addiction treatment, give clinicians insight into patients' personal lives, and possibly improve the therapeutic alliance.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the cost savings associated with improved access to telehealth are also substantial, with one study finding that telehealth diverts patients from more expensive care settings.ⁱⁱⁱ This same study found that cost savings were sufficient to offset the additional utilization of healthcare services caused by the convenience and accessibility of telehealth to patients.

OKSAM appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this legislation, and shares the state of Oklahoma's goal of ensuring that healthcare services, including addiction treatment, are accessible to all. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact OKSAM's president, Dr. Paul Cheng, at (580) 366-5407 at paulchengmd@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Paul Cheng, MD, MPH, FASAM
President, Oklahoma Society of Addiction Medicine

ⁱ American Medical Association. (2020). "Issue brief: Reports of increases in opioid- and other drug-related overdose and other concerns during COVID pandemic." Available at: <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-12/issue-brief-increases-in-opioid-related-overdose.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Uscher-Pines, L., Huskamp, A., Mehrotra, A. (2020). Treating Patients With Opioid Use Disorder in Their Homes. Chicago, Illinois: The American Medical Association. Available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2766674>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nord, G., Rising, K., Band, R., Carr, B., Hollander, J. (2019). On-demand synchronous audio video telemedicine visits are cost effective. Available at: [https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757\(18\)30653-3/fulltext](https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757(18)30653-3/fulltext)