

Insurers Have Been Receptive to Telehealth, Behavioral Health Company Says

CHE Behavioral Health Services, a Brooklyn company that has traditionally provided mental health services to patients in nursing homes, had been working on a telehealth solution for about two years when the pandemic hit.

It had deployed the service in rural settings, where telehealth was already being reimbursed by Medicare, but hadn't rolled it out in New York City. That has all changed in the past three months, and the company now is doing about 15,000 behavioral health televisits a month.

The company, which was founded in 1995, gradually expanded its offering to include nursing home workers, then their families and finally any person seeking behavioral health services. CHE, which has financial backing from private equity, employs about 700 licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners and other mental health professionals.

The company is now working on setting up outpatient clinics for people who need follow-up care after a telehealth visit. CHE offers virtual visits in seven states, including New York.

The behavioral health sector received a boost Thursday from Gov. Andrew Cuomo as the state's Department of Financial Services issued new regulations to promote parity between insurance benefits for mental health and substance-use disorders and other benefits.

The [proposed rule](#) requires health plans to designate an individual responsible for compliance with the state's parity rules and create written policies and procedures to promote equity. The state is accepting public comments on the rule until Sept. 7.

Behavioral health services that would have been covered if provided in person would also be covered when delivered through telehealth, according to DFS.

Insurance relationships will be critical as primary care and behavioral health organizations [wait for policymakers](#) to decide whether government insurers will keep paying for telehealth when the pandemic subsides. A few months ago, as more care became virtual, clinicians were [providing services](#) without assurances they'd be paid.

CHE has agreed to contracts with 15 insurers in New York to cover telehealth benefits, including most of the city's major carriers, according to a listing of plans on its website.

"Because we had run these pilots with telehealth, we have been successful at getting rate schedules in place," said Michael Lawler, chief executive of CHE. "Some of the health plans that were difficult to reach, once the pandemic hit, we started receiving inbound messages from them."