

November 20, 2020

Ms. Brean Arnold
Rules Coordinator
Oregon Health Authority
Health Systems Division
500 Summer St, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: ASHA Support for Proposed Telehealth Regulations with Amendments

Dear Ms. Arnold:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write with support of the proposed rules for use and coverage of telehealth technologies and suggest a clarification of the proposed language. While ASHA supports expanded coverage as proposed we recommend that the board consider amending section 410-120-1990 to simplify the regulatory language and provide greater clarity to providers and patients.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for more than 211,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 2,250 ASHA members reside in Oregon.¹

ASHA supports the intent of the proposed regulation including the coverage of synchronous (using audio and video, video only, or audio-only) and asynchronous (using audio and video, audio, or text-based media) and the requirement that telehealth services shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

However, ASHA notes that Section 410-120-1990 (6) states:

“...telehealth delivered services for covered conditions are covered:

(A) When an established relationship exists between a provider and patient as defined by a patient who has received in-person professional services from the physician or other qualified health care professional within the same practice within the past three years; and

(B) For establishing a patient-provider relationship.”

These provisions allow reimbursement of telehealth in circumstances when the practice has an established relationship with a patient and in cases where the relationship with the patient is established via telehealth as would be necessary for new patients. Since the proposed rule allows for reimbursement of both established and new patients, ASHA recommends simplifying the language to state:

(c) When allowed by individual certification or licensing boards' professional standards, telehealth delivered services for covered conditions are covered for all medically necessary services.

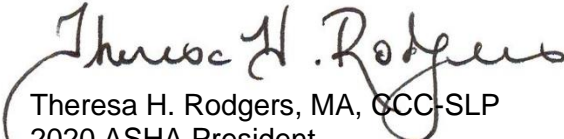
This simplified language clarifies the regulations' intent that telehealth services be covered for all patients in need of such services when provided in compliance with all other aspects of state law regardless whether the patient is new or established with a particular practice.

As the leading national organization for the certification and advancement of audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs), ASHA supports the development and use of telehealth, telemedicine, and telepractice. ASHA maintains a collection of professional practice documents, including a position statement that defines telehealth as "the application of telecommunications technology to deliver professional services at a distance by linking clinician to client, or clinician to clinician for assessment, intervention, and/or consultation." ASHA maintains that telehealth, telemedicine, and telepractice are interchangeable terms. These documents include service delivery guidelines that may be accessed on ASHA's website.²

ASHA strongly supports the use of and reimbursement for telehealth. Research demonstrates the equivalence of telehealth to in-person service delivery for a wide range of diagnostic and treatment procedures for adults and children.³ Studies have shown high levels of patient, clinician, and parent satisfaction supporting telemedicine as an effective alternative to the in-person model for delivery of care.⁴ Telehealth expands practitioners' availability to those in need—regardless of geographic location—saving time and resources for both the provider and the patient. Despite proven benefits, telehealth remains underutilized within both audiology and speech-language pathology due to a lack of clear state laws governing its use or mandating appropriate reimbursement for services delivered.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's comments on the proposed telehealth regulations. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director, state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Theresa H. Rodgers, MA, CCC-SLP
2020 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2020) *Oregon* [Quick Facts].
<https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Oregon-State-Flyer.pdf>

² The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.) *Practice Portal: Telepractice*.
<http://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Telepractice/>.

³ Grogan-Johnson, S., Alvares, R., Rowan, L., & Creaghead, N. (2010). A pilot study comparing the effectiveness of speech language therapy provided by telemedicine with conventional on-site therapy. *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 16, 134–139.

⁴ Ibid.