[Date]

[Name]

[Title]

[Organization]

[Address]

[City, State Zip]

RE: Expand Coverage of Telehealth Services

Dear Medical Director:

While the country is taking unprecedented precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, I write, as a participating provider, to request that your health plan take immediate action to expand coverage of telehealth services provided by audiologists and speech-language pathologists.

Audiologists are experts in providing services for the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of hearing, balance, and tinnitus disorders for people of all ages. Speech-language pathologists are experts in assessing, diagnosing, and treating speech-language disorders, swallowing deficits, and cognitive disorders, including speech sound disorders, stuttering, voice disorders, and language deficits. Limited telehealth options will soon create a chasm in the continuity of medically necessary care related to audiology and skilled therapy services and negatively impact patient function and outcomes.

As all of us are faced with the challenge of meeting our professional responsibilities and the needs of daily life while minimizing the spread of COVID-19, we must do what we can to help reduce the risk of exposure. Expanding access to telehealth services represents an efficient and effective means to facilitate continued access to medically necessary care for beneficiaries and allow providers to continue their work during this time of social distancing and increased isolation.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) supports broad access to telehealth in general, but recent events bring the need for expanded access into stark relief. To support implementation, ASHA has a developed a collection of professional practice resources, including attached recommended guidance for implementing telehealth coverage for audiology and speech-language pathology services.[[1]](#endnote-2)

Research demonstrates the efficacy of telehealth and its equivalent quality as compared to in-person service delivery for a wide range of diagnostic and treatment procedures for adults and children.[[2]](#endnote-3) Studies have shown high levels of patient, clinician, and parent satisfaction supporting telehealth as an effective alternative to the in-person model for delivery of care.[[3]](#endnote-4) Use of telehealth by audiologists and speech-language pathologists must be equivalent to the quality of services provided in person in order for such practice to be allowed within ASHA’s Code of Ethics.[[4]](#endnote-5)

Telehealth will expand my availability to those in need—regardless of geographic location or state of quarantine—saving critical time and resources for both my patients and me. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), those at greatest risk and vulnerability from COVID-19 include older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions.[[5]](#endnote-6) The CDC has also indicated that if a COVID-19 outbreak occurs within a community, it could last weeks or months.Offering telehealth options to audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and other allied health professionals could help reduce the spread of COVID-19; particularly because of the vulnerable populations that our professions serve.

Despite the proven benefits and effectiveness of telehealth, it remains underutilized across many health care professions including audiology and speech-language pathology due to a lack of uniform health plan coverage and reimbursement for services delivered via telehealth.

Thank you for considering my request to expand access to telehealth services provided by audiologists and speech-language pathologists. I appreciate the opportunity to share my comments on this important topic. Please contact [Contact Name] at **[**Enter Phone Number] or [e-mail**]** if you require additional information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Member’s Name, Certification

Practice Name

Attachment: [ASHA Recommendations for Telehealth Coverage](https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/ASHA-Recommendations-for-Telepractice-Coverage.pdf) [PDF]

1. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Telepractice. Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Telepractice/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). Code of Ethics. Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/Code-of-Ethics/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)