



Texas Society for Clinical Social Work



May 13, 2020

Dear Governor Abbott:

We are contacting you regarding the next steps necessary to ensure minimal disruption in the provision of mental health services to Texans as your current Disaster Declaration expires. The Texas Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers – Texas Chapter, Texas Association for Marriage and Family Therapists, Texas Counseling Association, and Texas Society for Clinical Social Work collectively represent over 75,000 licensed mental health professionals in the State of Texas. We applaud your rapid response to date to ensure that mental health services are available and safe for all. Accessing services via telehealth is a vital strategy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while allowing people to maintain treatment and support from their mental health providers. We ask you to consider an extension of this policy until a vaccine is available. However, if that is not possible a 60-day extension would provide all of us time to further evaluate the current situation and spread and make the best decision for Texans.

Until a vaccine can be found, the risks of transmission between mental health providers and clients, or among clients, will remain high. We treat many individuals in need of mental health services with compromising immune conditions that place them at greater risk of exposure. Many clients are also struggling with higher levels of anxiety that make travel outside their home a trigger. But these risks can be greatly minimized by allowing the continuation of current telehealth policies in both Medicaid and commercial plans. Providing services via telehealth alleviates mental healthcare professional shortages by making services more accessible to individuals in need, including those in rural and underserved areas. Further, continuing audio-only telephone ensures that mental health providers can continue treatment for individuals who have no access to other technology. Any rollback of telehealth will compromise the ability of vulnerable individuals in our communities to safely seek mental health treatment.

We ask that you support continuity of care by directing the Texas Department of Insurance and Texas Health and Human Services to continue the utilization of telehealth, including accessing many services by phone-only.

COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on the state's healthcare system, which includes how mental services are delivered to individuals in need. Please let us know ways we can partner with you going forward.

Sincerely,

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