

# Telehealth tips for individuals receiving services

## Telehealth and privacy: What does this mean for you?

Because of recent COVID-19 social distancing requirements, the State of Washington has been working to increase telehealth services to make sure people's needs are met. Telehealth means services are delivered using technology such as telephones, texting and internet-based platforms such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime etc.

The community behavioral health agencies (providers) where you receive behavioral health services are required to follow privacy laws related to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in how they deliver telehealth.

Because some appointments cannot happen in-person during this time, providers may ask for your verbal consent instead of having you sign a written release of information.

Your provider will document that you gave verbal consent, and once social distancing requirements are relaxed, you will be asked to sign a written consent form.

The State is working with federal partners to make sure that mental health and substance use disorder treatment services are uninterrupted during this public health emergency.

Many of our licensed community Behavioral Health offices are closed, and you may not be able to get treatment services in person. Because of this, there is an increased need for telehealth services – services that happen over the phone or an internet connection.

## Making the most of your telehealth appointment

If you are new to telehealth, you might find the tips below useful.

- Choose a quiet, private place where others can't hear or see you.

- Find a comfortable place to sit for your appointment.
- Find a place without distractions.
- Make sure your phone or computer are charged.
- Have a glass of water near you.
- Have a pen and paper handy for taking notes.
- Have a box of tissues handy.
- Join five minutes early to prepare and make sure your technology is working.
- Include a pet or item that brings you comfort.

There are many ways to work with your doctor, nurse, therapist, case manager, clinician or peer support if online appointments are not comfortable. Your provider agency wants to support you during the Covid-19 Emergency. Please contact them to identify ways to meet your needs.

## Who to contact if you feel you are not receiving the services you need?

Behavioral health Ombuds are often people with lived experience in behavioral health who know what services are available will and can help people navigate and resolve problems.

Behavioral health Ombuds services are available throughout the state. Ombuds can assist to resolve both mental health and substance use issues. Ombuds services are primarily for individuals receiving Medicaid services.

[Find contact information for your local Ombuds.](#)

## For more information

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