

VA's Telehealth System Now Operational Nationwide

On June 11, the Department of Veterans Affairs passed a major milestone with the introduction of a telehealth system known as “anywhere-to-anywhere.” This system allows qualified practitioners to access the VA’s telehealth system and provide care to patients across the nation. This issue of *The ElderCounselor* will take a closer look at this telehealth system, which is part of the VA Mission Act.

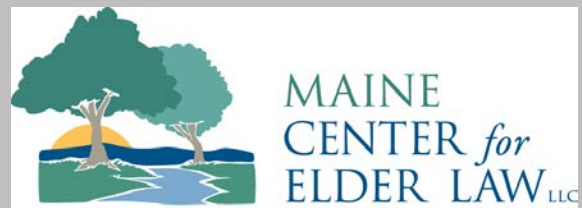
One facet of the recently passed VA Mission Act is to provide protections for VA telehealth services. The law extends regulatory protections to VA telehealth providers and blocks states from interfering with providers who are part of the VA telehealth network, even if they do not comply with state regulations.

A major advantage of this system is that it gives physicians the ability to determine if the patient needs to receive care at one of the already crowded VA facilities, or if care would be better received at home or a community care center. Inside the VA clinics, the telehealth system allows patients and local caregivers to connect digitally with physicians and specialists across the VA system. There is another option that launched June 2017, known as the VA Video Connect application. VA Video Connect is a desktop and mobile application that allows patients to connect with physicians and specialists without ever leaving their home. So far, this application has connected over 22,700 veterans with 4,500 unique VA providers—this is especially effective for rural patients who have to travel long distances to their nearest VA health center.

Another area where the VA is making strides in telehealth is for Veterans in need of mental health care. Generally, patients will connect with physicians through video conferencing technology which allows the patient to see and hear the physician but eliminates the need for travel that could be disruptive or costly. This is especially important for patients with severe cases of post-traumatic stress disorder because it allows them to receive the care they need in a controlled environment in which they feel comfortable.

While the VA currently treats dozens of conditions via telehealth services and has plans to add more in the future, (you can view a complete list [here](#)) the VA specializes in four main telehealth services:

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Polytrauma: The polytrauma telehealth services allow the VA to link their four Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers along with the 17 Polytrauma Network Sites together to congregate all of the expertise across the VA network into one place. Patients receive multiple opinions from care providers and the physicians can consult each other in real-time to determine the best path of care for their patients.

TeleMental Health: As mentioned previously, another area the VA is specializing in is caring for mental health patients through the telehealth system. One in three Veterans suffer from mental health disorders, and this service has been effective in providing a safe and comfortable environment for Veterans to receive care.

TeleRehabilitation: This service allows patients who are recovering from a stroke to be linked to a speech pathologist to begin the rehabilitation process. The VA also uses TeleRehabilitation to connect with Veterans and monitor their functional status and equipment needs.

TeleSurgery: The main use for this service is for surgeons to receive specialist consultation in remote sites, before operating on a patient. The VA also uses this service to provide patient and staff education and pre/post-operative assessment.

With over nine million patients served each year, it is integral that the VA does everything possible to ensure Veterans receive quality care in a reasonable amount of time. One of the ways they are accomplishing this is through the telehealth system.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

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