Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Beacon Health Options has compiled a variety of publicly available resources and ideas to help providers minimize barriers as they serve vulnerable populations impacted by the crisis. Please note that Beacon is providing the third-party resources as a reference tool for providers but is not endorsing them.

Telehealth with vulnerable populations

- Elderly
- Domestic Violence Victims
- Homeless
- Seriously Mentally Ill

- Children with Autism
- Parents
- Adolescents and young children
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Resources to minimize barriers

Device issues: No Device, No Internet-No Data, No Electricity

- Some states have government-provided phones.

- SafeLink government phones: Unlimited talk & text and extra 5GB of data for free.

- Free federal phone program: https://nationalverifier.servicenowservices.com/lifeline

- QLink Wireless Lifeline program: https://qlinkwireless.com/lifeline/about-lifeline.aspx

- List of all internet and phone companies pledging to keep Americans connected during pandemic: https://www.fcc.gov/companies-pledging-keep-americans-connected-during-pandemic-go-above-and-beyond-call

- Find low-cost Internet and affordable computers in your area: https://www.everyoneon.org/

- List of No-Cost Internet services during pandemic: https://www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/internet-guide-during-coronavirus-outbreak#no-cost-internet

- Some providers are delivering disposable phones to clients who do not already have phone access.

- Some providers are offering limited access to their centers by providing private rooms that clients can come to and have no/little interaction with a computer and electricity to charge devices. They then disinfect after each use.

Lack of Technical Skills

- Create Tip Sheets to walk members through the log-in process for the provider's telehealth platform.

- Text or email out Tip Sheets and/or a short "Telehealth Introduction" video explaining how to log into and use the platform.

- Have a technical support number for members to call for assistance with telehealth.

- Post your Tip Sheets and your "Telehealth Introduction" video to your website.

SMI population

- LAI Guidance: https://smiadviser.org/knowledge_post/what-are-clinical-considerations-for-giving-lais-during-the-covid-19-public-health-emergency

- Webinar for SMI population: ACT, Group Homes, Supportive Housing: https://education.smiadviser.org/Users/ProductDetails.aspx?ActivityID=7315

- Some providers have set up drop-in centers instead of providing full-day treatment programs. Those clients who are actively psychotic or unwilling/unable to use electronic devices can see a therapist/psychiatrist. The provider can transport such clients to the center, and all social distancing rules are observed. The provider also has lunch catered into the facility and takes meals to those members who are unable to cook for themselves.

No safe place to have a confidential session

- Providers have set up private rooms with a computer that clients can come to and have no/little interaction. They then disinfect after each use.

- Providers are meeting members in parks or similar settings while ensuring social distancing and confidentiality.

- Providers can check on domestic violence victims by having them reply with certain code words or phrases that indicate a need for immediate intervention. One therapist had her client text her about buying face masks (which she didn't sell), and this cued her to contact local law enforcement.

No current provider

- PQMs have a list of telehealth-ready therapists who can accept new patients.

- Providers offering emergency triage number people can call for intake for telehealth.

- Set up an access "hotline." Callers are screened, triaged, and then "patched" to support staff for scheduling based on the category they fall into:
    - Green: Not urgent or client refuses telehealth; elected to wait for face-to-face
    - Yellow: High need but not an emergency or client accepts telehealth
    - Red: Imminent danger. Client needs evaluation by ES clinician and immediate appointment, possibly face-to-face

Older adolescents and younger children

- Sessions should be shorter as children are more easily distracted and may not understand the need for telehealth service

- Develop resources to aid providers seeing these populations that help keep their attention.

- Provider training webinar about treating children and families over telehealth: https://media.beaconhealthoptions.com/VIDEO/coronavirus-2020/Treatment-of-children-and-families-over-telehealth.mp4

Accessibility issues for phone/online platforms for persons who are deaf/hard of hearing and/or have low or no vision.

- Must provide an interpreter or captioning.

- Guidelines for healthcare providers - Video-based telehealth accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing members: https://www.nad.org/covid19-telehealth-access-for-providers/

- How to communicate with your deaf/hard of hearing or deaf/blind patient: https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/How-to-Communicate-With-Your-Deaf-Hard-of-Hearing-or-DeafBlind-Patient-PRINT.pdf

- Guidance on calls with hard of hearing patients: https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/Guide-Hard-of-Hearing.pdf

- Guidance on relay calls: https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/CallCenterGuide_HandlingCalls.pdf

Children with autism

- Relias: ABA Parent Training course package, available free of charge: https://reliasacademy.com/rls/store/browse/productDetailSingleSku.jsp?=&productId=p329898&utm_campaign=iddabapartner

- Supporting individuals with autism through uncertain times: https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times

Parents with difficulties finding time/ability to have telehealth sessions due to juggling working from home, homeschooling, small children to manage, lack of privacy, etc.

- Offer after-hours or weekend sessions. Be flexible with appointment times.

- Establish protocol or guidance for parents when doing telehealth with children and others in the home.

- Consider adjusting cancellation policies. Remind clients they can cancel/reschedule if unable to maintain privacy due to children or others being in the home.