

# Gov. Pritzker Signs Landmark Legislation Expanding Telehealth Access

July 22 2021 1:32 PM



CHICAGO– Joined by healthcare leaders and elected officials at Mount Sinai Hospital, Governor JB Pritzker today signed HB 3308 into law, increasing access to telehealth services in communities across Illinois. The new law builds upon ongoing efforts to ensure that all Illinoisans have uninterrupted access to telehealth, which they received from trusted health care providers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, Governor Pritzker signed [Executive Order 2020-09](#), requiring insurers to reimburse health care providers for telehealth with the same payment rates as in-person care. This helped expand healthcare access for vulnerable populations, including mental health services. The legislation the Governor

signed today prevents a gap in coverage by permanently extending the payment parity requirement for mental health and substance use disorder services, while authorizing all other telehealth to be covered through 2027.

“The legislation I’ll sign today will solidify Illinois as a leader in telehealth access and expansion in the nation,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Illinois is now one of the first states in the nation to turn our emergency pandemic response into a permanent reality. Not only that, but it expands key telehealth services like Early Intervention programs for early childhood development, adding to the growing number of telehealth services the General Assembly authorized this year. We are taking great strides to make sure that where you live no longer impacts how long you live. Thanks to this new law, we are one step closer to that reality today.”

“Over the past 18 months, hospitals across the state have made critical investments in telehealth and staff to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to keep their patients safe,” said A.J. Wilhelmi, President & CEO of Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA). “IHA and the hospital community thank Governor Pritzker and his administration, and the General Assembly – especially Senators Napoleon Harris and Mattie Hunter and Representatives Thaddeus Jones and Deb Conroy – for their leadership and work to make sure the vital benefits of telehealth for patients are not lost.”

“On behalf of our 1.7 million members across the state and all adults over 50, AARP Illinois commends Governor Pritzker for signing this important telehealth bill into law today,” said Bob Gallo, State Director of AARP Illinois. “The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized just how critical it is for Illinoisans, and especially older adults in our state, to have access to telehealth services, while it highlighted the barriers that often prevent them from getting the critical health care they need. AARP Illinois championed this bill as part of our multiyear Disrupt Disparities agenda, which advocates for policies to improve the lives of older adults of color across the state.”

“Sinai Chicago serves Chicago’s West and Southwest Sides, providing care for patients who were hit especially hard by COVID-19. In our communities, impeded access to care because of issues related to transportation, child care, senior care and mobility were exacerbated by the pandemic,” said Karen Teitelbaum, President and CEO of Sinai Chicago. “Telehealth was vital in allowing Sinai Chicago to continue to provide critical services to our community when it was needed most. And now, we are making telehealth a permanent practice to serve the needs of our communities, increasing communication and access, helping patients manage chronic conditions at home and enhancing our data collection and analytics to continue to evolve our delivery of care. That’s why this legislation is so important, and we are proud to join with Governor Pritzker and the other elected officials and community leaders who advocated for its passage.”

The legislation prevents insurance plans from requiring a patient to attend an in-person visit before a telehealth service. It also expands the early intervention services that can be provided through telehealth. To protect confidentiality, the bill bars insurers from requiring patients to provide a reason—such as proof of hardship or an access barrier—for choosing a telehealth visit over an in-person consult. Additionally, an insurer cannot require patients see a healthcare provider virtually if they prefer an in-person visit, nor can an insurer mandate that physicians offer telehealth.

“Telehealth will not only help patients but doctors as well,” said State Senator Napoleon Harris (D-Harvey). “Now appointments can be more efficient when in-person visits are not needed, and disproportionately impacted community members will have access to these services, which were not equitably provided throughout the pandemic.”

To ensure telehealth services continues to improve patient outcomes, the legislation commissions a study to be reported in 2026, which will examine the impact of telehealth on health equity and patient access to care.

“With this law, Illinois is making great strides in improving mental health care services,” said State Representative Thaddeus Jones (D-South Holland). “I am extremely proud that our work will have a significant impact for all the members of my community who are having difficulty getting the proper mental health care. No one deserves to face these severe challenges without professional help, and thanks to this law, they won’t have to. Thank you to the governor and my colleagues in the House and Senate for helping pass such a critical law.”

Telehealth has proven to be critical in saving lives throughout the pandemic. With the increase in the use of telehealth services, there has been a notable reduction in missed appointments, better care plan adherence, and significant improvement in chronic disease management. With the pandemic creating new barriers for individuals already suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders, telehealth also makes counseling more attainable.

“The pandemic highlighted gaps in healthcare coverage and revealed new ways for people to be consulted by their doctors,” said State Representative Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park). “This measure guarantees that health insurance companies shall cover all telehealth services rendered by a health care professional—including mental health services. Any medically necessary treatment is now covered by insurers, just like a traditional, in-person visit would be.”

“The need for telehealth services has always existed, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated that need,” said State Senator Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago). “I’m ecstatic that this measure will give patients the flexibility to receive the treatments they

need, whether it be isolation due to an illness or remote services due to a lack of mobility. This is a great addition to other health reform initiatives the state has seen this year.”

To date, only a handful of states have enacted telehealth payment parity into law, further cementing Illinois as a national leader in expanding access to healthcare. The administration has already eliminated the Medicaid backlog, signed legislation to bring \$250 million in new federal healthcare funding to Illinois, signed the Healthcare and Hospital Transformation bill into law, and worked with the General Assembly to make Illinois the first state in the nation to offer healthcare access to undocumented seniors.

HB 3308 is effective immediately.