

# Telehealth Parity - SF 524 and Call to Action



Mental Health Solutions Focused on You

Okoboji Broadcast with Jeff Thee and Champion State of Mind

April 9, 2021

*Thank you to the following organizations for their information contributions:*

**Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association**

**NAMI: Iowa Chapter**

**National Association of Social Workers**

**American Counseling Association: Iowa Chapter**

*Please join and follow these amazing organizations to stay up to date on SF 524 and many other Mental Health advocacy opportunities.*

***Link to previous video recording on Telehealth Parity – March 24, 2021- Okoboji Broadcast with Jeff Thee***

<https://www.facebook.com/103338181146047/videos/144882867453551>

## **What Is Telehealth Parity?**

Originally, Telehealth Parity was within Bill HF 294:

In a nut shell, HF 294 allowed for:

1. Reimbursement parity equal to face-to-face mental health services
2. removal of site of service location limitations regarding billing for provider and client
3. removal of a staff member/person having to be in the room with a client for telehealth to be billable

Unfortunately, Bill HF 294 died in the Funnel this past week when Sen. Jeff Elder, the Chair of the Iowa Senate Human Resources Committee did not bring HF 294 up for a vote.

However, late afternoon on April 1<sup>st</sup>, members of the Iowa House Human Resources Committee amended another bill to include the Telehealth Parity language.

**A Special THANK YOU to Rep. Joel Fry and Rep. Ann Meyer for their support of telehealth and increasing mental health access within the State of Iowa.**

The amended bill, SF 524, originally was created to establish a committee to study the mental health bed tracking system in Iowa.

This week, the bill SF 524 was passed out of the Iowa House Human Resources Committee and remains alive- thus allowing Telehealth Parity to stay alive as well.

Bill SF 524 is set to move onto the Iowa Senate, but for SF 524 (mental health bed tracking system & Telehealth Parity) to stay alive, it must be moved onto the Senate floor by Senate President Jake Whitver. If Senator Whitver does not allow it onto the Senate floor for a vote, the bill dies.

Key Point- Bill SF 524 originated in the Iowa Senate and already unanimously passed on March 10<sup>th</sup> from there it moved it onto the Iowa House. Now since the Iowa House has amended the bill to add Telehealth Parity language, it must go back to the Iowa Senate for approval of the bill with such amendments.

## Reasons to Support Telehealth Parity

- This is not a telehealth parity bill. **This is an access to mental health services bill.**
- During the pandemic numbers of persons reporting anxiety and depression has increased from 11% pre-pandemic to almost 50% during the summer of 2020 (per the CDC statistics). Clearly, the need has never been greater.
- There was a significant increase in the use of telehealth visits between 2018 and 2019 already. From 2018 to 2019 Telehealth visits increased by 460%. In 2020 they increased by 6000% for mental health related conditions due to the pandemic. Mental Health related needs also continue to increase
- At the same time, we have had workforce issues with people unable to participate in face to face due to health concerns and issues. Telehealth made ongoing therapy possible.
- Cancellation and no-show rates have dropped significantly with the telehealth option. Transportation and health concerns are less of an issue.
- Access to specialists in all areas of behavioral health is now possible across the state.
- Telehealth services offer a higher level of privacy for clients, especially in rural communities, and saves time and money for traveling costs.
- We want to keep money in the state and not have to use tele health practices that are only an app or a nationwide service. We want to support local businesses and ensure that providers in the State of Iowa are utilized to their fullest potential.
- Many behavioral health independent providers will no longer provide this service if not reimbursed fairly, based on a recent surveys.
- Make sure that Iowa maintains a competitive workforce and that providers and students want to stay in the state.
- Other reimbursement options, such as a universal value-based payment (VBP) model, cannot be blankly applied to behavioral health services. While such models are heavily reliant on point data, many behavioral health providers do not use a universal, standardized system of measurement to evaluate client outcomes. Mainly because each client's treatment plan and goals are subjective by design- each highly individualized to meet the client's needs. Plus, a person's mental health is always adapting- fluid in its own right. To try to apply hard data points to such fluidity will result in overly complex results. Which if such reimbursement rate requirements are rigidly set by private insurance companies in order to obtain payment, mental health companies will quickly fall short of such strict data-based requirements, thus losing more profit and causing further job loss and less access mental health services to Iowans.
- A "free market solution" is not the appropriate answer in response to telehealth reimbursement rates. Insurance companies hold a monopoly on reimbursement systems. A free-market solution implies that there would be reasonable, business-sustaining options for Iowa medical businesses, which would also include small Iowa companies. When insurance companies hold the power to fully dictate reimbursement rates and to set requirements to receive such rates, it can quickly cause revenue decline, job loss or even closures of among Iowa businesses since such requirements are developed to lean in favor of large corporations or even the insurance company themselves.

## **SF 524 Needs YOUR Help!**

### **Patient, family members and friends- we need your voice to be heard!**

The House clearly supports this position, so we need to concentrate on the Senate.

**We need SF 524 to be called to a vote to the Iowa Senate floor.**

**Contact your Senator and Senate President Jack Whitver to tell them you value telehealth and believe it should be reimbursed the same as in-person visits. Ask them that it be brought to a vote in the Senate.**

**Also ask your Senator to speak directly with Senate President Jack Whitver about allowing it to be brought to a vote in the Senate.**

**We vote our Senators and Representative into their positions- they are to represent their constituents- as the constituents we need to make our voices heard on this issues and demand that our Senators be our voice at the Capital and not that of third-party outsiders.**

**Note that Legislators are receiving many emails during this pandemic environment, which is reducing their effectiveness.**

**We encourage everyone to consider attending a legislative forum, either virtually or in person, or giving your legislator a phone call.**

Monday-Thursday you can call the House or Senate Switchboard and ask for your legislator:

**Senate Switchboard Line:** 515-281-3221

**House Switchboard Line:** 515-281-3371

To find contact information for your local legislators, please visit the following website:

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>

Here is also a list of upcoming legislative forums:

[https://namiiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/133/2021/04/Legislative-Forums-2021.pdf?emci=88dbbf61-d993-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&emdi=5ceb5907-e693-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&ceid=18365137&fbclid=IwAR2wU\\_80xskf-T3-4PEXZ3xx0zjjPru1OG-LZQ2gl3-dpK-JNAD11kplAVY](https://namiiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/133/2021/04/Legislative-Forums-2021.pdf?emci=88dbbf61-d993-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&emdi=5ceb5907-e693-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&ceid=18365137&fbclid=IwAR2wU_80xskf-T3-4PEXZ3xx0zjjPru1OG-LZQ2gl3-dpK-JNAD11kplAVY)

NAMI Iowa- Story Writing Worksheet

<https://4e8jq323b9ev3hz9h2d6id0j-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/133/2021/03/Story-Building-Worksheet.pdf>

NAMI Iowa- Day on the Hill- Additional Resources

<https://namiiowa.org/2021-day-on-the-hill/>