

For Immediate Release

Connecticut Health Centers Applaud Medicare Decision to Permanently Cover Audio-Only Behavioral Health Service

Service was set to expire at the end of the federal public health emergency

CHESHIRE, CT —Wednesday, November 10, 2021

The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) applauds the announcement from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that audio-only behavioral health services will continue to be covered under Medicare after the end of the federal public health emergency. Offering audio-only behavioral health services has increased access to care and given many patients the opportunity to receive treatment for behavioral health issues throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

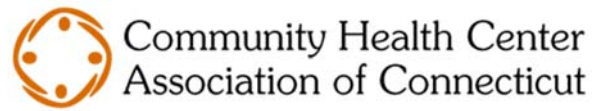
The state's 17 community health centers are located at more than 100 locations throughout Connecticut. They provide primary care, dental care, behavioral health care and more to nearly 400,000 Connecticut residents each year, regardless of their ability to pay. They serve nearly 30,000 patients every year who receive Medicare benefits and deliver over 500,000 behavioral health visits every year.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Connecticut and the public health crisis that ensued, Connecticut's community health centers have served as the frontline providers of care, testing, and medical services in the fight to keep people healthy. Since the availability of the COVID vaccine earlier this year, our health centers have vaccinated over 300,000 residents against the virus that causes COVID-19.

Telehealth has been a vital lifeline for health center patients throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued coverage of telehealth services will enhance access to care for our most vulnerable populations.

Connecticut's hospitals have seen a dramatic increase in Emergency Department usage for behavioral health issues, and it is anticipated that there will be a heightened need for behavioral health services in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Health centers offer same-day primary care, dental, and behavioral health services, and are often able to identify and begin treatment for behavioral health issues before they become severe. Continued Medicare coverage of audio-only behavioral health services will give health centers the resources they need to best serve their patients and help our communities recover from this pandemic.

Ken Lalime, CEO of CHCACT, said in a statement, "our health centers have seen an increase in demand for behavioral health services due to the pandemic, and patients having access to their providers via telehealth has been absolutely critical to helping people get through this pandemic. Our health centers serve many who experience barriers to accessing health care, and telehealth has been a tremendous help for health center patients. Prior to widespread availability of telehealth, our health centers had many missed appointments because patients couldn't access reliable transportation. Telehealth has helped bridge that gap."



CHCACT looks forward to working with federal and state governments to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to quality behavioral health services.

A complete list of all of Connecticut's community health centers is available on [the CHCACT website](#).

About CHCACT

Incorporated in 1989, the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening and supporting the clinical and administrative operations of community health centers across Connecticut. CHCACT's mission is to advance and align the work of health centers, with stakeholders, to improve the health and wellness of all.

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