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Telehealth Resource Center

MARKETING YOUR TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

TOOLKIT FOR RURAL PROVIDERS

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Marketing Your Telehealth Program

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OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role that telehealth can play in addressing health disparities and healthcare challenges. In rural communities, telehealth has shown to be particularly effective in improving access to care for rural residents by eliminating common barriers to care, such as the need to travel for medical appointments. Successful telehealth program implementation depends on the ability to market and encourage patient participation. This, toolkit provides marketing guidance and resources to support rural providers who want to successfully grow and sustain their telehealth programs.

In this toolkit you will find:
- Guidance on developing your marketing plan from planning phases to evaluation
- Information on different types of telehealth options and delivery modalities
- Tools to help you determine the most appropriate media method to reach your patients
- Guidance on tailoring your messaging to your target patient population
- Evaluation guidance to help you measure the effectiveness of your marketing efforts
- Sample marketing templates for you to customize to your needs

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GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Answer the Following Questions:
1. What services are you providing via telehealth? (See Telehealth Types and Modalities)
2. What modalities are available for each of these services? (See Telehealth Types and Modalities)
3. Which patients are most appropriate for each of these services and modalities?
4. What is the most effective way to reach these patients?
5. What is the most effective message for these patients? What matters most to them?
6. What is your budget to reach these patients?

Step 2: Develop Your Marketing Plan, Messaging and Resources
1. Develop your marketing plan. Based on the questions above, determine who you will reach out to, how you will contact them, what messaging you will use, and when/how frequently you will contact them. (See Media Guide)
2. Determine how you will measure the effectiveness of your marketing plan. (See Evaluation Guide)
3. Develop your messaging for each service line and patient population. (See Messaging Guide)
4. Develop your resources (flyers, brochures, etc.) for each item in your marketing plan. You can use the templates provided in this toolkit (See Templates) or any format you prefer.

Step 3: Implement Your Marketing Plan and Measure Your Results
1. Make sure all staff is aware of the marketing plan, and get buy-in from key stakeholders. This includes all staff that interact directly with patients and any staff that supports the telehealth program.
2. Develop protocols indicating patient problem types that are appropriate to schedule for a telemedicine visit and empower all staff members who book appointments to automatically offer patients that option to care for their needs. Develop scripts to help schedulers learn how to offer this service to patients.
3. Provide staff with information about the telehealth program and appropriate responses to commonly asked/anticipated questions.
4. Ensure the appropriate staff know when and how to collect data per your Evaluation Plan. Provide tools if necessary.
5. Send out your media according to your marketing plan.

Step 4: Evaluate and Improve Your Marketing Plan
1. Review the data that you collect per your Evaluation Plan.
2. When you review your evaluation results, or when an element of your telehealth program changes, revisit the questions in Step 1.
3. Revise your marketing plan as needed based on the evaluation results and/or changes to responses to the questions in Step 1.

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TELEHEALTH TYPES AND MODALITIES

Below are listed several types of telehealth with their general descriptions and potential modalities for delivering services of each type. This list is for general informational/marketing purposes only. Different resources/organizations may define telehealth services differently and not all types, service, or modalities are reimbursable by all payers or in all settings.

Telehealth Type	Description	Potential Modalities
Real-Time *(Synchronous)*	Live, two-way interaction between a person (patient, caregiver, or provider) and a provider.	• Video conference software (including telehealth software) • Phone (audio-only)
Store and Forward *(Asynchronous)*	Electronic transmission of medical information, such as digital images, documents, and pre-recorded videos, from one provider to be analyzed and evaluated by another provider at another site.	• Electronic Medical Record • Secure direct messaging • Telehealth software
Remote Patient Monitoring	The use of digital technologies to collect medical and other forms of health data from individuals in one location and electronically transmit that information securely to health care providers in a different location for assessment and recommendations.	• Telehealth software • Remote Patient Monitoring equipment and software
Chronic Care Management *(Medicare Specific Service)*	Care coordination services done outside of the regular office visit for patients with multiple (two or more) chronic conditions expected to last at least 12 months or until the death of the patient, and that place the patient at significant risk of death, acute exacerbation/ decompensation, or functional decline. These services are typically non-face-to-face and allows eligible practitioners to bill for at least 20 minutes or more of care coordination services per month.	• Phone • Video conference software • Chronic Care Management software
Virtual Check-In *(Medicare Specific Service)*	Short, patient-initiated communications with a healthcare practitioner. Involves 5-10 minutes of medical discussion. May involve remote evaluation of recorded video and/or images from patient, including interpretation with follow-up with the patient within 24 business hours.	• Phone (audio-only) • Video conference software • Secure text message (photos or videos) • Email • Patient Portal
E-Visit *(Medicare Specific Service)*	Non-face-to-face patient-initiated communications through an online patient portal. Involves E/M (physicians, NPs, PAs, etc.) or assessment and management (other non-physician practitioners) for 5 or more minutes over a period of up to 7 days.	• Patient Portal/Secure Messaging
Mobile Health *(mHealth)*	The provision of health care services and personal health data via mobile devices, such as cell phones, tablet computers, and personal digital assistants (PDAs). Can also include consumers obtaining specialized medical/health information via wireless devices and participation in online discussion groups to provide peer-to-peer support.	• Mobile devices • Dedicated application software • Text messages and mobile alerts

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MEDIA GUIDE

Select the media method that best fits how your target population(s) receive(s) information. Consider the service line, telehealth type/modality, payer/insurance provider, and patient demographics (age, gender, rural/urban, income level, etc.) when selecting the most appropriate medium. Do some research (see Additional Resources), and you can even ask some of your patients, to determine which forms of media your patients may use/prefer.

Print
Print advertising in the hometown newspaper or popular magazines can be very effective for the right demographic (particularly older adults).

Broadcast
If your budget allows, local radio and television advertising can be effective if placed on channels/stations that your patients use frequently.

Social Media
Social media (such as Facebook) accounts can be created at no cost. Let your patients know how to follow you on these platforms and then you can create posts for no cost beyond the time taken by a designated staff member. Paid, targeted advertising can be purchased on social media platforms and is relatively inexpensive. Social media can be an integral part of your telehealth development strategy. Develop your business pages with appropriate photos and descriptions of your practice. Utilize consistent photographs and content across different platforms if you use more than one. Show yourself and your staff as real people and build trust with those who follow your page/content. Conversations that are authentic lead to trust and business development. Plan to provide value to people through social media through posts, live videos, or moderated groups. Don't be afraid to ask for shares of your content to spread your reach to others.

Email/Electronic Medical Database
Your patient records system may allow you to run a report to generate a list of patients with specific diseases that you want to care for through your telehealth program. Start with one disease and develop targeted marketing by messaging them via email or directly through your patient portal, if you have one.

Personal Contact
Community events, health fairs, community service organizations, etc. are great places to contact patients (and potential patients), especially in a small town.

Sponsored Events
Budget allowing, your facility could host a (in-person or virtual) "Grand Opening" event for your telehealth program. This would allow patients an opportunity to learn more about the services you provide and meet any new providers or consultants that you have brought on board/contracted. It would also allow patients to see the equipment and technology and have the providers explain how it works, to eliminate concerns and better prepare them for a telehealth visit.

Direct Mail Marketing
Targeting mailings to specific populations can be effective if done right. These marketing materials will need to be meaningful to the specific population, eye-catching, and include a call to action. This type of marketing outreach involves gathering your own distribution list or purchasing distribution list(s).

Earned Media

Make local news outlets (including television, radio, and newspaper) aware of the work that you are doing in your community. These outlets are often looking for general interest stories. If you happen to be contacted by local news media about something else (positive) that is happening at your facility (such as a recent award/recognition, etc.) be sure to mention the services that you are offering to help increase access to care in your community.

Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth advertising can be difficult and challenging as you don't have control over the messaging. However, it can be beneficial to advise patients who have had a positive experience in their clinic about the telehealth services that are available and ask them to share this message with their family and friends. Even if a particular service may not be needed by this patient, they may know someone or even be involved in managing the care of others who could benefit from the services (such as their children, spouses, or parents).

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MESSAGING GUIDE

The messaging utilized should be tailored for the target population that you are trying to reach. You will need to consider similar factors (service, type/modality, rural vs. urban, demographics) used to determine the best medium. In addition, you'll want to consider the goals, values, and potential barriers (including language barriers) of the target population. Your messaging will also vary by medium. For example, social media posts will be shorter than print advertising.

Some examples of considerations for different patient populations are:
- Chronically ill patients may respond well to messaging that emphasizes how your services can help them manage their conditions and reduce travel time and expenses.
- Tech-savvy and younger patients may respond well to advertising that emphasizes the use of technology and convenience of telehealth.
- If you offer access to specialty care through telehealth, it can be beneficial to emphasize how this service allows patients to get care without having to travel out of town.
- Older patients may respond well to messaging that emphasizes reduced travel and wait times, assures them that they will still receive one-on-one time with their provider, and focuses on easy to use/familiar modalities.

Additional Considerations:
- Personal stories are often very powerful. If you have a patient who is willing to share a testimonial, communicate clearly what will be shared, and how, and be sure to secure the patient's consent to share their image, name and words with the media and general public. This is usually done through the signing of a Media Release form.
- Use images and verbiage that tell a story. Help audiences "see" how the service can benefit them, rather than just listing off symptoms. Focus on the benefit to the patient and how the service can meet their needs.
- Use a conversational tone rather than an academic or overly clinical tone. Remember the general and medical literacy of your patient population.
- Be consistent with your general messaging and commit to your marketing schedule. Consistency builds trust, and repetition is critical in marketing.

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EVALUATION GUIDE

Marketing strategies should be evaluated to determine their success. Evaluation results can be used to identify which strategies are the most effective to determine which strategies need to be continued, modified, or discontinued.

Evaluation can be conducted using quantitative data or qualitative data, or a mixed method approach using both data types.
- Quantitative: surveys; datasets; quantifiable educational assessments; quantifiable data
- Qualitative: interviews; photos; videos; participant or non-participant observation
- Mixed methods approach: combining quantitative and qualitative data

To develop your evaluation plan, determine the most appropriate type of data for each marketing activity and how you can best collect this information. Keep in mind all of your existing and potential touchpoints with the patient populations.

Sample Evaluation Methods:
Examples of methods of collecting data for evaluation are below. Keep in mind that you want to select the evaluation measure that is most relevant to the given marketing activity. For example, you would want to measure website visitors in relation to marketing activity that drives patients to the website.
- Number of website visitors collected using website analytics software
- Newsletter sign-ups or open rate collected using e-newsletter software
- Number of patients that contact for more information
- Number of views and/or interactions on social media
- Patient surveys
  - Can include formal surveys (add questions about telehealth program to existing satisfaction surveys or sending out a specific survey) or simply asking (and measuring) patients who schedule appointments if/how they heard about your telehealth program

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TEMPLATES

Several templates are provided with this toolkit that can be utilized for your marketing tools. Below is a list of the template items provided and some recommendations on utilizing each. Remember that it is important to customize these to meet the needs for your program and patient populations per your marketing plan. To access these templates, click here or visit https://wellaheadla.com/telehealth/ and navigate to "Step 4: Inform Patients" located in the Starting a Telemedicine Program section.

Office Flyer
- Select a photo that best represents the populations you are targeting and their needs that you are trying to meet with the service.
- Use as few words as possible to get your message across.
- Emphasize the call-to-action.

Brochure
- Select imagery that attracts and is relatable to your target population.
- Since brochures can be picked up and taken home, more detailed information can be included. However, keep it brief enough to be a very quick read, and keep in mind that all verbiage should be written in simple, laymen's terms.
- Emphasize the benefit to the patient and the call-to-action.

Mail or Email
- Ensure that it is clear that the mail/email is coming from your office. The less it looks like a mass mail-out or junk mail, the more likely your patients are to open and read the content.
- The information included should be informative, but concise. If a letter or email is lengthy or includes a lot of text, it is likely to be overlooked or discarded.
- Focus on announcing the availability of services (especially in the first communication/marketing activity), the benefit of the service to the patient and how they can access the service (or get more information).

Social Media
- Social media posts should be very short. Patients should be able to read the content in a few seconds, know if the service can benefit them and know the next step to take.
- Ideally, the patient should be able to take an action (click to visit a website), directly from the post.
- Keep in mind that verbiage should be written in simple, laymen's terms.
- Videos shared on social media should be focused and provide value to your viewers. Patients should view you as an authority in the field.
- Remember the four laws of social media:
  - Be likeable: Demonstrate authenticity to your patients.
  - Be credible: Only share facts to earn patient trust.
  - Be recallable: Post regularly on social media.
  - Be profitable: Profitability will be achieved if all of the above are done correctly.

Sample Verbiage
- Included in the templates is sample verbiage and terminology that may be more effective for different patient populations.

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REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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Additional Resources
- Well-Ahead Louisiana
  https://www.wellaheadla.com/
- Well-Ahead Louisiana Provider Education Network
  https://www.walpen.org/
- TexLa Telehealth Resource Center
  https://texlatrc.org/
- American Telemedicine Association
  https://www.americantelemed.org/
- Center for Connected Health Policy
  https://www.cchpca.org/
- CMS Chronic Care Management Services MLN Booklet
  https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/medicare-learning-network-mln/mlnproducts/downloads/chroniccaremanagement.pdf
- HHS Telehealth
  https://telehealth.hhs.gov/
- Medicare Telemedicine Healthcare Provider Fact Sheet
  https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicare-telemedicine-health-care-provider-fact-sheet
- National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers
  https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/
- Office of the National Coordinator
  https://www.healthit.gov/

This toolkit is a collaborative effort of Well-Ahead Louisiana
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