

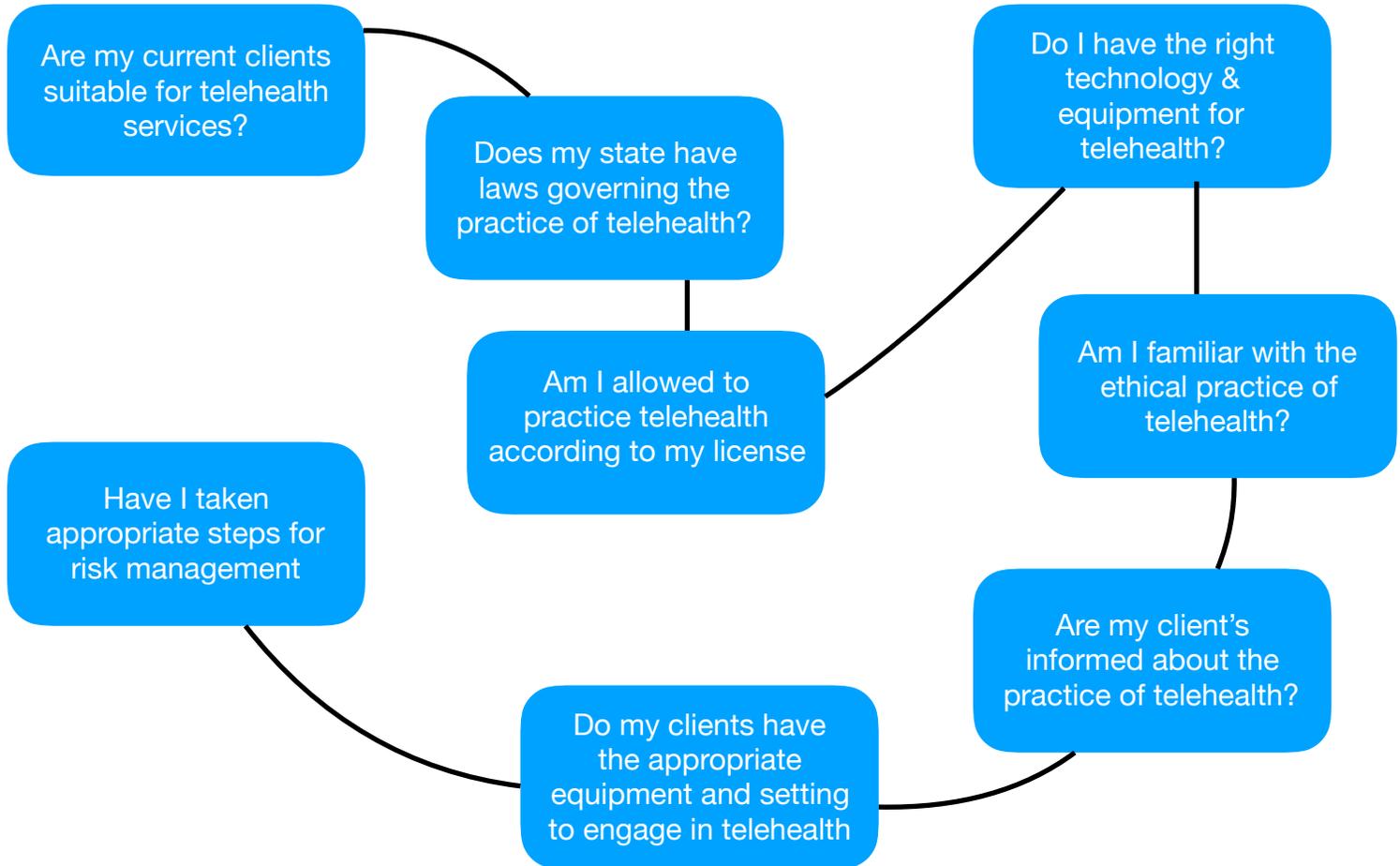
iSIG

Internet, Social Media, & Technology
An AGPA Special Interest Group

Quick Start Guide for Starting in Telehealth

Getting started in telehealth practice is not as difficult as it might seem so long as you take your time to understand the ins and outs of providing mental health services utilizing online tools and platforms. This guide will hopefully walk you through some of the ways you can get started providing mental health services in your practice or organization.

Start here



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Are my current clients suitable for telehealth services?

This question asks you to consider your current caseload and to make a clinical determination on whether or not a particular client is suitable for telehealth services. Factors to consider are your client's level of cognitive functioning (ie: can they operate the equipment independently or do they need assistance), the client's physical location, the client's clinical presentation and personal risk among many other factors.

Does my state have laws governing the practice of telehealth and am I allowed to practice telehealth according to my license?

Many states do have specific laws governing the practice of telehealth or teletherapy. It is the responsibility of the clinician to familiarize themselves with the state statutes for the state in which they are licensed and are practicing.

*Resource tip: look up your administrative code for your license; also check out the app **Telemental Laws App by Epstein Becker Green** available on iOS and Google Play.*

Do I have the right technology and equipment?

The short answer is probably. If you have a computer or tablet with an internet connection, you have the bare minimum to begin telehealth practice. There are other practical considerations though including the quality of your microphone, camera, as well as headphones and speakers. You also want to make sure your internet speed is fast enough to handle a video call. Other pieces of equipment to consider are external microphones, tripods, and lighting/backdrops.

Platform

There are many different platforms in which you can deliver tele-therapy health services. Whatever platform you decide to use, you need ensure that it meets the standards and requirements of ethical practice and HIPAA compliance. This means to evaluate the security and privacy as it relates to the storage of information/data to help maintain confidentiality. One way to ensure this is through a Business Association Agreement (BAA) that ensures that a third party protects the data and has provisions for regular auditing of data security.

Resource tip: check out the iSIG Quick Guide to telehealth platforms

Am I familiar with the ethical practice of telehealth?

This is going to be self determined. As a clinician you are responsible for knowing both the inherent risks and benefits from practicing telehealth, familiarizing yourself with your local and state laws/statutes governing the practice of telehealth, and reviewing the ethical guidelines set forth by your professional organization. ([American Psychological Association Telehealth Guidelines](#), [NASW Guidelines](#) etc)

Do my clients have the appropriate equipment and setting to engage in telehealth?

This is a determination that needs to be made within the context of each individual client. Aspects to consider: Does my client have access to a private space within their residence or work to engage in a session? Are they aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on their end (thin walls, location of session, family members or roommates passing by)? Do my clients have access to the required technology and internet connection to engage in effect telehealth practice?

Have I taken the appropriate steps for Risk Management?

There are many aspects of Risk Management to consider especially when providing telehealth services. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, it will hopefully provide a frame to consider how you or your organization chooses to implement telehealth. These risk management steps will likely overlap with the questions above and it is good best practice to review this repeatedly as begin your implementation process:

Know the rules

- Familiarize and state board requirements
- Familiarize and understand state licensing laws and differences between practice jurisdictions

Competence

- Do I consider myself competent in providing distance services?
- Am I competent in the use of the technology that I have chosen?

Emergency/Crisis Services

- Do I have a plan for each client should an emergency or crisis arise especially if my client is far away?
- Do I have an emergency contact for the client or am I familiar with emergency services, resources, and procedures for where my client is located?

Security and privacy concerns

- Is the location that I am providing services (origination site) secure and private and free from distraction?
- Is the location that my client is receiving services secure and private?
- Is the software/platform/technology I am using secure and private and do I have the appropriate safeguards in place (BAA) with the service company?

Appropriateness for distance services

- Do I have a rationale and justification for my clients appropriateness for distance tele-health?
- Are any of my clients high risk or require extensive support between sessions?

The decision to move to telehealth in these uncertain times is a decision not to be taken lightly. Continuously self evaluate, seek formal consultation or supervision, and when necessary or appropriate, seek legal counsel or advice from your liability insurance company.