

**NOTICE:** All provider agencies that receive this publication are **REQUIRED** to distribute this update in a timely manner to **ALL** therapy practitioners and/or case managers contracted or employed by your agency. You are encouraged to distribute to others that may benefit from this information as well. Thank you so much for all you do!

### COVID-19 and Therapy Services

- Wow! So much is happening so fast! We appreciate all your questions and concerns related to therapy services during this healthcare crisis.
- These are such stressful times and many therapists are learning more than they ever thought possible in such a short time about telehealth, apps, and creative methods of providing needed services. One OT shared that she ordered take out to be delivered to a residential home (as a way to support individuals and DSP) and monitored/trained CARMP services via telehealth as housemates and staff were enjoying the meal. We love that!!! You are awesome! Kudos for all the creative therapy strategies and stories of triumph as well as frustration that you are sharing in these challenging times!
- In order to address the rapidly changing circumstances and directives, CSB is using the *Therapist Updates* as one of the major methods of communication of important information to DD Waiver therapy agencies, therapy practitioners, and interested IDT members.
- PLEASE DISTRIBUTE THIS TO ALL CLINICIANS ASAP! We will address some of the most FAQs from therapists and agencies related to COVID-19 and Therapy Services in these issues. Please continue to send your questions and comments to the CSB and your CSB therapy consultants! We will strive to get answers and get back to you ASAP and will continue to provide as many resources as we can.
- Please note - this is a very fluid situation and directives can change rapidly. This *Therapist Updates* is current as of the time of release, but therapists and readers should follow the latest guidance available as circumstances do change rapidly.
- We continue to urge each and every one of you to follow all current recommendations related to social distancing and limiting exposure to the virus for yourself, your families and all those you work with!
- Let's continue to do all we can to support each other and practice patience and understanding during these stressful times.

### FAQs Related to Therapy Services Provision during the COVID-19 Crisis

1. **Q:** "I work with an individual with critical health needs that requires frequent evaluation of pressure injuries. Related positioning recommendations often need revisions. Are there *any exceptions* to the directive that therapists cannot provide therapy services in the home or on-site?"
  - **A:** There are **No Exceptions** to restrictions on therapists visiting individuals on DD Waiver in their homes. Therapists should continue to use telehealth and phone conferencing to complete needed training, monitoring, consultation services, or to attend therapy-related meetings until you receive notice that this restriction has been lifted. Therapists may need to collaborate closely with nursing and staff that do have

home access when this is needed. Agencies must support telehealth, phone or video interactions for clinical visits and trainings.

- As of this date, there is sadly one individual on the DD Waiver who passed away due to COVID-19. This loss has been felt statewide and our sincere sympathy goes out to the family and all team members. The fact that we have so little evidence thus far of more individuals on the DD Waiver testing positive for COVID-19 is a tribute to IDTs keeping on-site exposure to an absolute minimum. Thanks for continuing to protect all of the individuals, staff and families that we work with!

## 2. Q: “What have you heard about the Appendix K request to increase AT funds to facilitate increasing access to laptops or tablets that can support Telehealth visits?”

- A: Appendix K in every Waiver application addresses emergencies and States may edit elements as needed in case of disasters. The edit to the AT Fund portion of the Appendix K request has been approved. Here are some of the *highlights* of the guidance document on implementation of this section of Appendix K. *Please check the Appendix K- AT Guidance document (distributed 4-8-2020) for additional important information and specific details!*
  - To ensure health and safety and to support access to telehealth, individuals who do not currently have access to a computer, tablet, cell phone or other device in the home are able to utilize AT funds in excess of \$250.00 in order to purchase a needed device that allows remote video conferencing, training and monitoring. The current maximum funding allowed under AT is \$250.00 per ISP year. With this Appendix K amendment, the maximum allowed for AT during the Public Health Emergency will be \$500.00.
  - Provider agencies must allow individuals to utilize agency devices in their provider owned or operated settings to support all telehealth services. Please sanitize all surfaces including the keyboard, after each use. ***If such devices are available in the home request of AT funding is not necessary.***
  - The individual/guardian and the IDT team must discuss and agree on the best device to be purchased. That device will be used at the home for all remote family, guardian, CM visits, DDW clinician services and medical services for that individual. The training platform or service will be discussed and agreed upon for all to use in order to minimize confusion. ( Ex- Zoom for Business, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
  - AT funds are not available for the cost of internet services. If internet access is not available to the individual, the IDT and agency must collaborate to determine how internet services might be made available or determine an alternate method of providing access to telehealth services such as basic cell phone service.
  - The residential, CCSI agency, DSP and DDW clinicians are responsible for understanding how to set up, and use the system. Times for telehealth visits, monitoring or training will be coordinated with family, DSP, and clinicians.
  - ***Application Process:*** The Budget Based AT fund Application form must be completed per the current process by the requesting clinician and submitted to the Case Manager. In addition to the current required information, the requestor must indicate the rationale for using this particular device for telehealth sessions related to the COVID-19 crisis. The requestor must put the words “COVID 19 related request” on the AT Fund application. AT Fund requests based on Appendix K guidelines must be submitted by 6/30/20.

For budget revisions submitted to the CORE, **Case Managers must note COVID AT Request on the cover sheet and check Imminent Review.** The Intake team DOES NOT review the AT Application.

- Please check the DDS COVID-19 site <https://nmhealth.org/about/dds/diro/ddcv/> for specific updates on Appendix K AT guidance.

**3. Q: “What about use of PST funds for Telehealth equipment and supports?”**

- A: Personal Support Technology is not part of Appendix K and has no changes. Therefore, the scope of service, clinical criteria, and funding amount remains the same. PST in the current Standards does not fully address telehealth needs. The AT Fund is to be accessed for telehealth supports at this time!

**4. Q: “Did CMS approve the Retainer Payments for OT,PT, SLP, and BSC practitioners as requested though Appendix K?” “If so, how do I apply and how much financial support can I qualify for?”**

- A: Unfortunately, CMS did not approve retainer payments for OT,PT, SLP, and BSC despite DDS’s sincere defense of this request. DDS is concerned about the consequences of this denial on the availability of these services for individuals on the DD Waiver. We hope that therapy agencies and therapists can take advantage of the programs available for small businesses, sole proprietors and independent contractors through the small business administration (SBA). Here is an additional resource for current details: <https://www.sba.gov/page/coronavirus-covid-19-small-business-guidance-loan-resources>

**5. Q: “ If I am conducting a phone or telehealth session from my home (which is a ‘Standard Rate’ county) to an individual’s home (which is in an ‘Incentive Rate’ county) do I bill the Standard Rate or the Incentive Rate?”**

- A: – You would bill the Incentive Rate. The billing procedure and rate is the same as if you provided the therapy service in person.

**6. Q: “We received an urgent notice from NMOTA and NMPTA regarding the NM DOH Public Health Order of 3.24.20. There is concern that therapists have to submit a policy and plan for how they are going to comply with this delay of “non-essential” medical services. What do I have to do?”**

- A: Our understanding is that this order applies to medical hospitals and various medical clinics and does not apply to school therapists or DD Waiver therapists. Since we are providing services only through telehealth platforms, we are not causing a strain on the healthcare delivery systems for PPE.

**7. Q: “What are some additional ways that therapists are and can provide needed supports to individuals who are now spending much more time at home and whose schedules have been upended during this healthcare crisis?” (Note: We covered a variety of additional suggestions in the last Therapist Updates.)**

- Some therapists are finding that clients are having more visible frustration and increased behavioral issues given that schedules and routines are often drastically changed.
  - consider modification of visual or alternative schedules, modification of sensory support plans, consultation regarding alternative physical activity and home routines as needed, etc.
  - Use your creativity to train various WDSIs such as: safe bathing procedures, CARMPs for aspiration risk management, safe transfers, difficult positioning, range of motion, etc. This can be very challenging. You may need to model correct strategies via video and have DSP model strategies back to you. You may need to collaborate with nursing or an on-site staff to assist with this as needed.
- Use this time to revise WDSI’s to include telehealth related activities, training staff and/or individuals in use of your chosen telehealth platform.
- Introduce individuals to on-line exercise programs and household activities that could provide more physical activity (great time to start a yard care program!)
- Consider if the individual needs additional Assistive Technology Support.
  - Ordering, fabrication, and training related to AT/PST needs might be very appropriate during this time. Use the AT Fund to assist the IDT to order low-cost tablets, chrome books, and other devices as needed to support telehealth and remote communication needs. Related resources are listed below.
- Support the staff/family/individual to participate in physical activities like walking, hiking, biking, gardening, etc. as well as indoor physical activities.
- Support the staff in finding ways to help the individual connect with family and friends including phone, Skype, Face-Time, etc. These activities can help decrease feelings of isolation, frustration and depression that social distancing can promote.
- Communicate and collaborate with other therapists and IDT members regarding the individual’s current needs and what strategies and modifications you are working on.

**Resource Information** (please check the *March Therapist Updates* for additional resources especially related to various Telehealth platforms and HIPAA news)

- As you are probably aware, daily updates regarding the current state of the virus and various NM announcements and Resource Documents are available on the DOH COVID-19 website at <https://cv.nmhealth.org/>

The DDS COVID-19 site at - <https://nmhealth.org/about/dds/diro/ddcv/> consolidates information especially relevant to DDS providers including: all DDS COVID-19 Numbered Response Memos; Guidance Documents; Policies; and a variety of very helpful Resource Documents. Please check these sites often for updates!

- This is a wonderful resource through the American Academy of Development Medicine & Dentistry related to COVID 19 specifically related to individuals with IDD:  
<https://www.aadmd.org/coronavirus-center>
- Remote teleconferencing resource- <https://www.freeconferencecall.com/> This resource now offers video conferencing as well! Let us know if you use this video conferencing platform and how it is working for you. It is likely not HIPAA compliant but may be an option during this COVID-19 health crisis. (See previous March 2020 *Therapist Updates* for more information on various Telehealth platforms and HIPAA news.)
- **Comcast Essentials Program.** Low cost internet \$9.95/mo. New Comcast customers can qualify for 2 free months at least until 4/30/20. If the individual is eligible for Medicaid, SSI, SNAP, etc. they are eligible for this program. Comcast also has gently refurbished computers available for approx. \$200 for individuals that qualify for Comcast Essentials! For more information and to apply: <https://internetessentials.com/>
- Do not forget that the **DiverselT program through Adelante** offers used computers to individuals with disabilities when there is no other source to affordably obtain one. Call: (505) 341-2000 or email: [DiverselT@goAdelante.com](mailto:DiverselT@goAdelante.com). They also have a training program that can help get computers fixed.
- The federal **Lifeline Assistance Program** provides *free cell phone services and may provide a free cell phone*. The Lifeline Assistance Program is available to low-income individuals in NM and can include special programs for individuals on tribal lands. Individuals may qualify based on household income or if they participate in certain public assistance programs like Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, or BIA/tribal assistance programs. Participating programs in NM provide varied benefits. One example from a company below is - 3GB free Data, unlimited free texts and 350 free Voice Minutes per month. Most also offer a free basic Smart Phone. Companies below offer this program in NM. There may be other companies that offer the Lifeline Assistance Program as well.  
<https://www.safelinkwireless.com>  
<https://www.choice-wireless.com>  
<https://www.cellularonline.com/freedom-fone>  
<https://www.assurancewireless.com/lifeline-services/what-lifeline>
- Individuals with wheelchairs have additional important considerations related to potential infection as they are typically positioned at a lower height which places them in the direct path of airborne particles and, due to contact with their wheels to propel, causes them to have a higher frequency of picking up dirt and germs on their hands. Please pass on the following document to individuals who use wheelchairs and their caregivers:  
<https://files.constantcontact.com/b205a096001/8f10714f-a2f5-405d-ade1-ea4368cb44b1.pdf> (If you are unable to download this link, please contact Mary Beth and a copy will be sent to you directly.)

- The Department of Economic Security has issued the following guidance related to small businesses and the COVID-19 health emergency: <https://gonm.biz/about-us/covid-19-response> This may be helpful information for your agency to assist during this time of financial uncertainty.

**Misc. Notices**

- Please be aware that billing guidelines for therapists must be adhered to! Be mindful that any e-mail, phone, telehealth consultation and collaboration under 8 minutes is not billable. Refer to the billing section of the DDW Standards Chapter 12 – Section 12.4.7.5 & Chapter 21 – Section 21.9.3. You must continue to document all billable services per therapy and Medicaid standards.
- Referrals to the *Specialty Seating Clinic* for wheelchair, positioning, and adaptive equipment can continue to be made. However, in-person Seating Clinic appointments will be delayed until further notice. We are also seeing people through telehealth platforms on an as-needed basis. Contact the Specialty Seating Clinic at (505) 232-5726 or at [specialty.seating@state.nm.us](mailto:specialty.seating@state.nm.us) for more information.
- Any adult with I/DD who is experiencing challenges related to oral eating and/or tube feeding can be referred to the *SAFE Clinic* for expert assessment and recommendations regarding eating/feeding, nutrition, positioning, and associated medical needs to support health, safety and independence. SAFE Clinic appointments will be delayed until further notice unless critical health exceptions are approved. Call Jacoba (Kotie) Viljoen PhD, MSN-Ed, RN, CCRN, CSB ARM Coordinator, SAFE Clinic Coordinator for further information. Office Phone: (505) 841-6188 / Fax# (505) 841-2987 or Email: [Jacoba.Viljoen@state.nm.us](mailto:Jacoba.Viljoen@state.nm.us)

**CSB Training Opportunities**

**UPCOMING PA/STANDARDS and ARM TRAINING**

**ALL ON-SITE TRAININGS ARE POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE!**  
 You will be notified if trainings will be available on-line  
 or when trainings are re-scheduled.

<b>ON LINE TRAININGS ARE STARTING</b>		
<b>Training</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b><i>Participatory Approach/Standards</i></b>	8:45 AM – 12:00 12:30 PM – 4:00	4/17/20
<i>Instructions:</i> You must pre-register for this on-line training by April 15 <sup>th</sup> at <a href="https://ddsctrain.cdd.unm.edu/Calendar.aspx">https://ddsctrain.cdd.unm.edu/Calendar.aspx</a>		

**Annual Mobility and Assistive Technology Conference – Save the Date!**

The Specialty Seating Clinic, along with Albuquerque Public Schools, is pleased to announce the dates of the 2020 Mobility & Assistive Technology Conference – October 19 & 20, 2020. We will again hold the conference at the APS Berna Facio Teacher and Staff Development Center in Albuquerque. We are already in the planning stages to provide you with another dynamic conference. More details will be released in late summer.

**CSB Contact Information: We're working from home, but we are here for you!**

CSB Bureau Chief: Elizabeth (Betsy) Finley, [Elizabeth.Finley@state.nm.us](mailto:Elizabeth.Finley@state.nm.us)

CSB AT/Therapy Coordinator: Felicia Vidro, [Felicia.Vidro@state.nm.us](mailto:Felicia.Vidro@state.nm.us)

CSB ARM Coordinator: Jacoba (Kotie) Viljoen, [Jacoba.Viljoen@state.nm.us](mailto:Jacoba.Viljoen@state.nm.us)

Contacts for the clinical consultant representing your discipline:

- Julie Mehrl, Occupational Therapy [Julie.Mehrl@state.nm.us](mailto:Julie.Mehrl@state.nm.us)  
505-975-5024 (cell) e-mail preferred. Text or call for urgent needs is OK.
- Mary Beth Schubauer, Physical Therapy [MaryBeth.Schubauer@state.nm.us](mailto:MaryBeth.Schubauer@state.nm.us)  
505-238-2247 (cell) Text or call is OK
- Demarre Sanchez, Speech Therapy [Demarre.Sanchez@state.nm.us](mailto:Demarre.Sanchez@state.nm.us)  
505-417-5264 (cell) Text or call is OK

**Kudos and Thank you!**

We know this is a stressful time for all of us and the individuals/families and teams we work with on so many levels. Many of you are taking care of family members, practicing social distancing and concerned about making ends meet at the same time.

Thanks to so many of you who, despite all the challenges, have gone above and beyond to creatively support the individuals and teams you work with during this extraordinary healthcare emergency! We appreciate you!

...THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO...  
STAY HEALTHY AND SAFE!!!