

Interim Final Rule with Comment Period Establishes Increased Payments for Audio-only Telephone Services

In the March 31 COVID-19 Interim Final Rule with comment period, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) established separate payment for audio-only telephone evaluation and management services. CMS acknowledges that audio-only services are currently serving as a substitute for office outpatient Medicare telehealth visits for beneficiaries who do not have access to audio-video technology. Accordingly, on April 30, the agency established payments for these codes that are analogous to office outpatient E/M services (99212-99214) and is relaxing enforcement of the “established patient” descriptor. This action increases payments for the services from a range of about \$14-\$41 to about \$46-\$110. The payments are retroactive to March 1, 2020. Although this new payment policy currently applies to Medicare physicians and patients only, we are hopeful that private insurance plans and state Medicaid plans will follow suit and adopt similar policies.

The telephone evaluation and management (E/M) services CPT codes:

- 99441 (Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 5-10 minutes of medical discussion);
- 99442 Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 11-20 minutes of medical discussion); and
- 99443 (Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 21-30 minutes of medical discussion).

Other commonly used psychiatry codes that have been approved for audio-only telephone services:

- 90785 Psychiatric interactive complexity
- 90791-2 Psychiatric diagnostic services
- 90832-34, 36-38 Psychotherapy services
- 90839-40 Crisis services
- 90845 Psychoanalysis
- 90846-47 Family therapy services
- 96116 Neurobehavioral status examination
- 90853 Group psychotherapy