

Alternative Telehealth Modalities

Text-Based Communications



What are text-based communications?

Text-based communications are the transmission of text messages through the use of cell phones, tablets, computers and PDAs to support health care delivery, public health practice and education.

Text-based communications include interactions between a patient and their provider, often, though not exclusively, through patient portals and SMS, and generally in advance or follow up to an office visit. Both patients and providers can initiate these communications.

How does this form of telehealth support patient care?

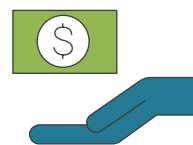


Text-based communications can support patient care in several ways. Systematic reviews of patient-to-provider text-based communications suggest these communications generally focus on chronic conditions like diabetes and respiratory conditions. Often, providers help facilitate behavioral changes.¹ Studies suggest an association with these types of communications and improved

health outcomes for diabetes² and high blood pressure.³ There is also evidence that two-way text messaging has led to an increase in knowledge regarding pregnancy for low-income prenatal patients.⁴




Even automated text message reminders have been associated with improved self-management and health outcomes for patients with chronic diseases⁵ including patients with diabetes^{6,7} and HIV.⁸ Text messages have also led to improvement in self-efficacy, knowledge and parenting skills for caregivers of adolescents with mental health issues.⁹

How are these services reimbursed?



Provider-to-patient text-based communications may be reimbursable, depending on the communications and service provided. Both Medicare and Medi-Cal cover asynchronous “virtual check-ins,” which require the patient to send their provider a video and/or image, accompanied by subsequent communications between the patient and provider. Medicare additionally covers “e-visits,” patient-initiated communications with a provider for up to seven days.

Reimbursable Provider-to-Patient Text-Based Communications

CODE	DESCRIPTION	COVERED BY MEDICARE?	COVERED BY MEDI-CAL?	COVERED BY COMMERCIAL PAYERS?
G2010	Remote evaluation of recorded video and/or images submitted by an established patient (e.g, store and forward), including interpretation with follow-up with the patient within 24 business hours, 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			Varies
99421-3	Online digital evaluation and management service, for an established patient, for up to 7 days, cumulative time during the 7 days; 10-minute increments		No	Varies

Endnotes

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The California Telehealth Policy Coalition

The coalition is the collaborative effort of over 80 statewide organizations and individuals who work collaboratively to advance California telehealth policy. The group was established in 2011 when AB 415 (The Telehealth Advancement Act) was introduced and continues as telehealth becomes integral in the delivery of health services in California. Convened by the Center for Connected Health Policy, the coalition aims to create a better landscape for health care access, care coordination, and reimbursement through and for telehealth.

Visit the coalition online at www.cchpca.org/about/projects/california-telehealth-policy-coalition.