



Driving Excellence in Addiction Care

February 26, 2021

Dear Chair Stephenson and Members of the Committee,

**MARRCH is a professional association of addiction treatment professionals and organizations striving to raise awareness about addiction and the power of recovery.** We represent more than 75 agencies and a workforce of more than 5,000 individuals with members in every region of Minnesota. The goal of MARRCH is to improve access to quality behavioral health services for all Minnesotans who need support and share the value of long-term recovery to the individual, families and communities we live in.

During the pandemic, overdose deaths surpassed those experienced during the opioid epidemic in 2018 and spiked 20% higher than rates in 2019. According to Minnesota Management and Budget, revenues from addiction related goods were up nearly \$37 million more than predicted in July through September alone. Concurrently, people who already struggle with access to social determinants of health such as stable housing and food support are experiencing outsized disparate impacts. While telehealth does not address all these needs, it has become essential to the way in which providers deliver services in the State of Minnesota.

Prior to the pandemic, the costs of equipment, training and technical expertise limited the ability of our provider community to use telehealth with our clients. When the Governor declared our workforce "essential," our front-line professionals quickly found ways to make telehealth work for our clients.

The usage of telehealth was amplified to great effect during the pandemic. We now utilize this new tool to effectively treat people with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health disorders. But this was only possible due to the federal and state funds provided as part of COVID relief, which can only continue if rate parity for telehealth continues. Otherwise, we will not be able to absorb the additional costs of ongoing hardware, software and technology upgrades going forward.

**The following issues highlight the key benefits of telehealth for our professionals:**

1. **Access:** Telehealth is proven to reduce barriers to access. It is more convenient for clients, helps to overcome historic disparities and BIPOC individuals, and aids mothers with children. Providers have seen a 10% increase in client engagement with telehealth.
2. **Workforce:** Telehealth supports our workforce by extending the reach of professionals and more easily incorporating mental health professionals into the care we provide for our clients.
3. **Sustainability:** Telehealth allows us to keep clients connected to treatment and support longer and supports improved client outcomes when allowed to use the tool flexibly between both in-person and telehealth to meet the client's needs.

**MARRCH appreciates the work of Rep. Morrison and others on H.F. 1412, and we look forward to continuing to work with her on this important legislation. Thank you.**