

The Vital Role of Equity in Telehealth and Medication Abortion Care Policy



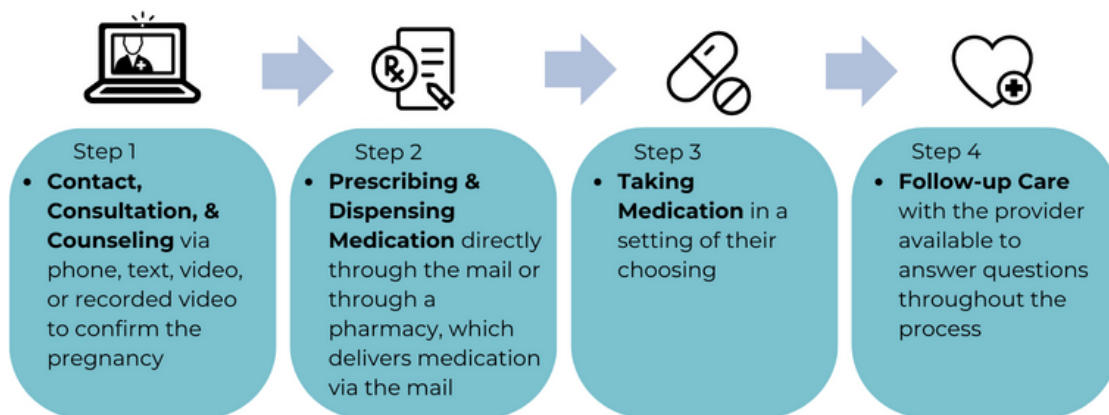
Background

- ▶ Telehealth has gained broad, bipartisan support for expansion. However, a few notable exceptions — in particular, access to medication abortion care via telehealth — face ongoing threats. Policymakers must address and overcome these barriers to ensure equitable access to care for all.
- ▶ States with abortion bans have significantly [worse maternal and infant health outcomes](#) and higher child poverty rates than states without such bans.
- ▶ Due to barriers including [stigma, geography, racial and income disparities, lack of digital and health literacy and broadband access, and other social determinants of health](#), access to telehealth and access to abortion are inextricably linked. Full, meaningful access to telehealth must include access to abortion using telehealth.

Why It Matters

- ▶ Telehealth gives patients in [rural or underserved areas](#) access to resources and care, improving efficiency and [reducing costs, travel, and wait times](#) and enabling [comparable quality of care](#).
- ▶ [More than half of all abortions](#) in the U.S. (53%) are performed using medication abortion.
- ▶ Abortions provided by telehealth providers [increased by 85%](#) comparing June and December 2022.
- ▶ Using telehealth, patients can receive medication abortion care — an FDA-approved regimen combination (mifepristone and misoprostol) to terminate a pregnancy — safely and effectively in their chosen setting.

Steps to Accessing Medication Abortion Care via Telehealth



Current Policy Landscape

- ▶ [Many policies impact the specifics](#) of telehealth utilization for abortion care, including coverage bans on public or private insurance, medically unnecessary in-person requirements or waiting periods, and whether care can be delivered across state lines or by different types of providers such as physicians, nurses, and psychologists.
- ▶ Several [telehealth policy changes](#) have been made since the COVID-19 pandemic, including some telehealth flexibilities that have been made permanent.
- ▶ Since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* Supreme Court decision eliminated the federal constitutional right to an abortion, [14 states have enacted abortion bans](#). [Twenty states](#) ban telehealth for medication abortion care or have medically unnecessary restrictions that effectively ban the service.
- ▶ In addition to policy restrictions, ongoing [litigation](#) could harm nationwide access to mifepristone, including telehealth being removed nationally as a care option for pregnant persons.

Factors Impacting Equitable Access to Telehealth Medication Abortion	Equitable Policy Solutions
<p>Service Restrictions <i>Bans an entire service or places medically unnecessary restrictions on care delivery</i></p>	<p>Lift medically unnecessary in-person restrictions and ensure that all telehealth expansion policies are in line with science, ensuring continuity of care, and defer to both clinical indication and patient preference.</p>
<p>Medicaid & Insurance Coverage <i>The cost of health services via telehealth are covered by public or private insurance</i></p>	<p>Require public and private insurance plans to cover the most comprehensive spectrum of telehealth, including for abortion care. Identify if there is permanent Medicaid coverage of all relevant telehealth modalities (video-based, audio-only, remote patient monitoring, etc.)</p>
<p>Reimbursement <i>Providing a portion or the full cost of a service</i></p>	<p>Support efforts to require reimbursement for telehealth care at the same rate as in-person care (parity) and increase reimbursement rates to ensure provider sustainability.</p>
<p>Technology and Access <i>Access to and knowledge of broadband, cell signal, and technology</i></p>	<p>Participate in and amplify broadband education and access campaigns. Ensure that providers of all types of services can access relevant training and funding streams.</p>
<p>Funding Investment <i>Resources to expand telehealth platform accessibility for providers and patients</i></p>	<p>Invest in telehealth infrastructure grants to ensure equitable delivery of services and high standards of care.</p>
<p>Language Access <i>Inclusive platforms for non-English speakers or speakers with limited English proficiency</i></p>	<p>Prioritize and provide support for investments in telehealth and technology education, particularly targeting expanded language access. Ensure translation services are reimbursed under public and private insurance.</p>
<p>Telehealth Awareness & Knowledge Gaps <i>An understanding of how telehealth works and how to access it</i></p>	<p>Facilitate education campaigns that promote cultural congruence, ensuring that up-to-date materials emphasizing the safety and effectiveness of telehealth — including medication abortion via telehealth — are readily accessible. Ensure that information is available in different languages, available verbally, and assistance is provided for using and understanding digital tools.</p>

Additional Resources

- RHITES: [Expanding Telehealth Access for Medication Abortion Care](#)
- American Telemedicine Association: [Telehealth Basics](#)
- [Center for Connected Health Policy](#)
- Kaiser Family Foundation: [Medication Abortion Via Telehealth: What You Need to Know About State Regulations](#)
- National Public Radio: [States With Toughest Abortion Laws Have Weakest Maternal Supports](#)