Impact of COVID-19 telehealth policy changes on buprenorphine treatment for opioid use disorder

Examined the impact of COVID-19 policies reducing barriers to telehealth-delivered buprenorphine for opioid use disorder (OUD) on buprenorphine care across different modalities (phone, video, in-person).

Key Findings

- Federal policy changes in March 2020 aimed to decrease barriers to telehealth delivered buprenorphine care.
- This study examined national Veterans Health Administration (VHA) data from 1-year pre-COVID-19 through 1-year post start of COVID-19 to understand impacts of these changes.

**Methods**

- Examined monthly rolling cohorts of VHA patients with OUD
- Conducted interrupted time series analysis to understand effects of telehealth policy changes
- Compared characteristics of patients before and after changes

By February 2021, phone visits were used most for buprenorphine care (50.2%), followed by video (32.4%) and in-person (17.4%).

**Conclusion:** The number of patients receiving buprenorphine continued to increase after COVID-19 policy changes, but the delivery shifted to telehealth visits, suggesting any changes to COVID-19 telehealth policies must be carefully considered.