



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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Region 4 Policy Brief: Telemental Health Policies in Response to COVID-19

Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

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The majority of youth accessing mental health care in the U.S. receive services at school.¹ School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic likely caused interruptions in mental health services for many youth.² Telemental health allows schools to provide mental health services remotely to students.³ It also has the potential to increase the volume of school mental health services and mitigate regional shortages of school mental health providers.³ As schools reopen, schools and mental health providers may find it helpful to continue to stay abreast of current telemental health policies. This brief report provides a summary of new policies and changes to previous policies (see our reports published in [March 2021](#) and [June 2020](#)) that affect school telemental health services in Region 4 (Southeast U.S.). These policies are time-sensitive and, therefore, may have changed since the the time of the update.^a

Below is a high-level summary of these policies:

- The 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act allocates [\\$122.7 billion](#) to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund to support schools' safe operations during reopening^b; allocates another [\\$80 million](#) to the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access fund to support pediatric telemental health programs; and allocates [\\$50 million](#) to the Community-Based Funding for Local Behavioral Health Needs fund to address a wide range of behavioral health needs, including access to telemental health services.
- At the time of this update, three states in the Southeast U.S. have ended the COVID-19 state of emergency: Florida ([6/26/2021](#)), Georgia ([7/1/2021](#)), and South Carolina ([6/7/2021](#)).^c Consequently, some of their telemental health policies—initially implemented in response to the COVID-19 state of emergency—have expired or been reversed, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

(Updated on 9/3/2021)

^a This work is supported by grant SM081774 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

^b Although not specified in the ARP Act, states may consider spending these funds to support school telemental health services.

^c [Kentucky](#) has ended many COVID-19-related restrictions but has not declared the end of the state of emergency. Both [Alabama](#) and [Mississippi](#) had previously decided to end the COVID-19 state of emergency, but reversed the decision later.



Table 1: HHS Region 4 Telemental Health Landscape and COVID-19 Responses

State	ARP Allocations for the <u>Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund</u> (millions) ^d	Expansion of Medicaid Telemental Health Coverage ^e		Telehealth Payment Parity Mandate for Private Insurers ^f
		Status	Expiration Date	
Alabama	\$2,021.5	Active	9/30/2021	No ^g
Florida	\$7,043.4	Expired	6/26/2021	Yes
Georgia	\$4,252.4	Expired	7/1/2021	Yes
Kentucky	\$2,001.2	Active	The end of the state of emergency	Yes
Mississippi	\$1,628.4	Active	9/14/2021	Yes
North Carolina	\$3,601.8	Active	The end of the state of emergency	No ^g
South Carolina	\$2,113.6	Expired	6/7/2021	No ^g
Tennessee	\$2,489.4	Expired	6/30/2021	Yes

^d Funds are distributed based on the share of Title I students attending schools in each state. The National Conference of State Legislatures tracks states' plans to spend the [ESSER](#) fund.

^e State Medicaid programs allowed or expanded coverage of telemental health services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

^f State requires that private insurers reimburse telehealth services at comparable rates as in-person services. [The Center for Connected Health Policy](#) maintains a database about state telemedicine laws, including whether or not states have telehealth payment parity mandates for private insurers.

^g No mandate was identified for this state using the [Center for Connected Health Policy](#) database.



Table 2: Status of Mental Health Workforce Deregulation in Response to COVID-19

State	Out-of-state Provider Licensure Waivers ^h				Pre-licensure Clinical Student Waivers ⁱ			
	Counselor	Social Worker	Marriage & Family Therapist	Psychologist	Counseling	Social Work	Marriage & Family Therapy	Psychology
Alabama				<u>A</u>			<u>A</u>	
Florida	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	
Georgia								<u>E</u>
Kentucky	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u> ^j	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>		<u>A</u> ^k		
Mississippi	<u>E</u> ^l	<u>A(R)</u>	<u>A(R)</u>	<u>A(R)</u>				
North Carolina	<u>A</u> ^m				<u>A</u>			<u>A</u>
South Carolina	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>E</u>				
Tennessee ⁿ	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>

A: waiver active

E: waiver expired

(*blank*): no such waivers identified

A(R): waiver active, but restrictions apply (e.g., providers must have an existing relationship with a patient)

Unless otherwise specified, all waivers have either expired or will expire on the same date as the end of the COVID-19 state of emergency.

^h Waives in-state licensure requirement for out-of-state licensed mental health providers.

ⁱ Permits pre-licensure clinical students to practice telemental health.

^j [KY Board of Social Work Statement on 04/07/2020.](#)

^k [KY Board of Social Work Statement on 03/17/2020.](#)

^l The MS counselor licensing board repealed the waiver on [05/21/2021](#).

^m The NC counselor licensing board announced the waiver is expiring on [08/08/2021](#).

ⁿ Executive Order 83 extended these waivers to [10/05/2021](#).



Resources

- ❖ The following mental health professional organizations have compiled telemental health policies since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic:
 1. American Psychological Association. (2021). *Telehealth guidance by state during COVID-19*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/clinic/covid-19-telehealth-state-summary>
 2. American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (2020). *Coronavirus and State/Provincial Telehealth Guidelines*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from https://www.aamft.org/Events/State_Guide_for_Telehealth.aspx
 3. Association of Social Work Boards. (2020). *State and Provincial Teletherapy Provisions*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://www.aswb.org/covid-19/>
- ❖ The Center for Connected Health Policy maintains an up-to-date database of various types of telehealth policies:

Center for Connected Health Policy.(n.d.) *Telehealth in the Time of COVID-19*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://www.cchpca.org/covid-19-actions/>
- ❖ The National Conference of State Legislatures tracks states' plans to spend the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund:

The National Conference of State Legislatures. (2021). *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Tracker*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/standing-committees/education/cares-act-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund-tracker.aspx>
- ❖ The Health Resources and Services Administration previously issued guidance on applying for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access fund appropriated by the ARP act to improve pediatric telemental health programs. Award decisions will be announced on September 30, 2021:

Health Resources and Services Administration. (2020). *American Rescue Plan Act Pediatric Mental Health Care Access – New Area Expansion*. Retrieved September 3, 2021 from <https://www.hrsa.gov/grants/find-funding/hrsa-21-122>

References

1. Ali MM, West K, Teich JL, Lynch S, Mutter R, Dubenitz J. Utilization of Mental Health Services in Educational Setting by Adolescents in the United States. *Journal of School Health*. 2019;89(5):393-401.
2. Golberstein E, Wen H, Miller BF. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2020;174(9):819-820.
3. Stephan S, Lever N, Bernstein L, Edwards S, Pruitt D. Telemental Health in Schools. *Journal of child and adolescent psychopharmacology*. 2016;26(3):266-272.