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new york**



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Improving The Lives of Senior Citizens & Families in NY State

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CID-NY

Center for Independence
of the Disabled, NY

**CITIZEN
ACTION!**
OF NEW YORK



June 24, 2022

Kate Bliss

Division of Program Development and Management

New York State Department of Health

Office of Health Insurance Programs

99 Washington Avenue, Suite 720

Albany NY 12210

Dear Kate,

We, the undersigned organizations, would like to thank the New York State Department of Health (DOH) Office of Health Insurance Programs (OHIP) for launching a *Telehealth Consumer Survey* to inform future telehealth policy development in New York State. We are further grateful to the State for increasing the Survey's accessibility to New Yorkers by disseminating it online and making it available in eleven languages. We write today to urge you to extend the *Telehealth Consumer Survey* deadline for an additional 30 days, to past July 31st in order to afford community-based organizations, trusted messengers and healthcare providers adequate time to deploy the survey among the communities they serve and for the State to receive ample survey responses that are truly representative of as many New Yorkers as possible. We also request that paper versions of the survey should be provided to local departments of social services and other community-based partners to ensure individuals who face barriers to responding electronically can participate.

Telehealth holds great potential to improve access to critical health services, particularly for New Yorkers facing barriers to in-person visits and those living in areas with provider shortages. As New Yorkers increasingly turn to telehealth to meet their health needs, it is incumbent upon our State to ensure equity, access and quality of telehealth service provision. Evaluating the telehealth experiences of our State's consumers is integral to objectively assessing telehealth equity. As the *Telehealth*

Consumer Survey opened on May 20th, closing it on July 1st would result in it being accessible for shortly over one month – a not nearly long enough window to receive ample and representative responses.

Barriers to online survey completion can be especially problematic for New Yorkers impacted by the digital divide (disproportionately New York’s communities of color ¹ and communities living in poverty), individuals with disabilities and marginalized young people struggling to access behavioral health services via telehealth, for whom telehealth access is of particular concern – and for whom documentation of telehealth experience is critical in order for the State to make informed decisions about telehealth policy development. For example, New York’s Black youth are currently experiencing a mental health crisis and are at an elevated risk of suicide in New York.² They have shouldered numerous traumas over the course of the past few years via the pandemic, in addition to systemic racism that plagues society. Accordingly, we need to ensure that all voices are heard during this process, especially those who may have difficulty accessing and completing the survey online.

We thereby collectively urge the Department of Health to promptly extend the *Telehealth Consumer Survey* deadline for an additional 30 days, and provide paper surveys to local departments of social services and other community-based partners to enable a more representative sample of New Yorkers to share their experiences utilizing telehealth to meet their health and behavioral health needs. We thank you for your prompt attention to this crucial matter. We look forward to working alongside you to ensure equity, access and quality of telehealth service provision in New York State.

Sincerely,

The Children’s Defense Fund – New York

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

Citizen Action of New York

Health Care For All New York

Hispanic Federation

Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign

New York Statewide Senior Action Council

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

¹ “The State of Black New York,” New York Urban League, November 2020, https://ad1a3eae-9408-4799-abebaa6ebc798f5b.usrfiles.com/ugd/ccf12e_06a44ca4995a40d7944b361219f9a6d8.pdf.

² “Black Youth Suicide in New York: An Urgent Crisis,” Children’s Defense Fund – New York, March 2021, <https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/05/Black-Youth-Suicide-in-New-York-An-Urgent-Crisis.pdf>.