

Important Information from the Optometry Board regarding COVID-19 (coronavirus) and Telehealth Utilization

The South Carolina Board of Examiners in Optometry wants you to know that the safety of the public and our licensees is our top priority. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, the Board is providing you with the federal and state COVID-19 resources below. The Board would like to inform you that it supports continued optometric services through any method of practice within your scope of practice that complies with the applicable standard of care, including telehealth for the period of State of Emergency as declared by the Governor of the State of South Carolina. If you elect to utilize telehealth, the Board suggests that you review the AOA resources provided below and be mindful of these key points:

- **Telehealth.** This provision of health care allows evaluation, assessment, intervention, etc. to occur without requiring both individuals to be physically located in the same place, regardless of whether that distance is across the street, across a city, state or continents.
- **Standard of Care.** The standard of care provided to the patient must stay the same as in-person treatment.
- **Limitations.** Telehealth is not appropriate for establishing the doctor-patient relationship or for an initial diagnosis or other types of care where face-to-face interaction is indicated. Patients must be made aware of the limitation of telehealth services and should be given the option of in person care. At its current stage of development, telehealth is not capable of replacing all elements of an in-person comprehensive eye exam by an eye doctor.
- **Legal requirements.** Optometrists must abide by the South Carolina licensure laws and regulations when delivering telehealth services, which can be found at the following links:
<https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t40c037.php>
<https://www.scstatehouse.gov/coderegs/Chapter%2095.pdf>
- **Practitioner Qualifications.** In addition to adhering to standard South Carolina licensing qualifications, optometrists using telehealth as a method of service delivery should maintain appropriate education and training; best practices; related competences for the patient populations served and practice settings. The practitioner **must be licensed in the state in which the client receives those services.**
- **Billing and Reimbursement.** The Board of Optometry does not control billing issues, insurance issues or employment contracts. Each licensee should individually investigate the policies, which relate to their practice/learning environments from multiple perspectives such as reimbursement sources, employers, accreditation agencies and malpractice insurance providers to identify any additional requirements or concerns, which may be germane to practice and reimbursement.

- **Ethical Considerations.** The Board recommends that its licensees review the AOA Code of Ethics (<https://www.aoa.org/about-the-aoa/ethics-and-values/code-of-ethics>) and the AOA Standards for Professional Conduct (https://www.aoa.org/documents/about/Standards-of-Professional-Conduct_Adopted-June-2011.pdf) for additional ethical considerations for their practice.

Resources

AOA Position Statement Regarding Eye and Vision Telehealth Services

<https://www.aoa.org/Documents/Legal/Position%20Statement%20Regarding%20Eye%20and%20Vision%20Telehealth%20Services%20-%20Referenced%20in%20HOD%20Resolution%201989.pdf>

AOA Ethics Forum Regarding Telehealth Care/Telemedicine

<https://www.aoa.org/about-the-aoa/ethics-and-values/ethics-forum/telehealth-care/telemedicine>

HealthIT.gov Telemedicine and Telehealth

<https://www.healthit.gov/topic/health-it-initiatives/telemedicine-and-telehealth>

CDC: What Healthcare Providers Should Know Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID-19 Infection?

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/caring-for-patients.html>

South Carolina Department of Health COVID-19 Information:

<https://scdhec.gov/health/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>