

# American Dental Association

## 2020 Teledentistry

### Policy Update



The American Dental Association (ADA) updated its teledentistry policy to “better serve dentists who rely on this technology to take care of patients.” The ADA policy recognizes that telehealth technology:

- Is an effective way to extend the reach of dental professionals
- Increases access to care by reducing the effect of distance barriers, and
- Expands the reach of a dental home to provide needed dental care.

### TECHNOLOGY NEUTRAL TELEHEALTH

The ADA policy promotes the use of technologies as important tools for dentists in evaluating, diagnosing, and treating patients remotely including:

- Synchronous
- Asynchronous
- Store-and-forward
- Remote patient monitoring
- Mobile health technologies

This permissive approach, which states that a valid patient-practitioner relationship can be established through the telehealth technologies listed above, relies on the discretion of state-licensed dentists and orthodontists and is consistent with the telehealth policies endorsed by the American Medical Association, the Federation of State Medical Boards, the American Telemedicine Association, the American Association of Dental Boards, and the American TeleDentistry Association. From an ethical perspective, the new policy permits dentists to respect patient autonomy, moving away from the historical paternalism of the profession.

The new ADA policy is a significant step forward for teledentistry as it **retracts** previous language that had limited the use of asynchronous and store-and-forward technologies for consultation purposes only.

### PATIENT SAFETY AND THE STANDARD OF CARE

The new ADA policy holds that the “services delivered via teledentistry must be consistent with how they would be delivered in-person,” specifically, they must meet the same standard of care by:

- Requiring that the dentist be licensed in the state in which the patient resides
- Exams “performed using teledentistry must be based on the same level of information that would be available in an in-person environment,” and
- Records are “sufficient for the dentist to make a diagnosis and treatment plan.”

Of note, the Resolution **does not** mention specific record requirements for specific procedures nor standing orders for diagnostic testing for certain dental procedures. The decision on what diagnostic records are needed to formulate a treatment should be left to the treating dentist, which conforms with the joint FDA/ADA *Guide to Patient Selection for Dental Radiographs*.

### PATIENT RIGHTS

The ADA policy affirms that a patient has the right to (1) know the identity of their treating dentist (including their license number, address, and phone number); (2) know the cost of any treatment before treatment begins; (3) have informed consent regarding the technology to be used in treatment; (4) be actively involved in treatment decisions; and (5) have access to any records made during treatment. Furthermore, the treating dentist must be prepared to supply the patient with a list of “local dental resources to provide appropriate follow-up care” if needed.