

Expanding our telehealth coverage



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Whether they are standing in line at the grocery store, riding public transportation, sitting in a waiting room or passing each other on the sidewalk, it is obvious that people are tied to digital devices. With so many aspects of our lives—such as finances, health and social networks—linked by these devices, the rapid pace of technology can be overwhelming and can have a negative impact on our health if we don't take time to unplug.

However, technology also is bringing a positive health outcome, through what we now call telehealth.

- Insect bites
- Minor sprains, scrapes and bumps
- Pink eye
- Sinus infections
- Skin conditions
- Stomach flu
- Strep throat
- Urinary tract infections

If deemed appropriate by the online provider, they can write a prescription if the medical condition requires one. Also, similar to an in-person visit, the online provider can give a work-absence note upon request.

So how much does it cost you to use the Plan's telehealth program? A \$10 copayment per appointment.

Not only does this program provide affordability and convenience for those who are unable to squeeze in another commute or appointment, it now comes with additional services. The positive member feedback led us to expand our telehealth benefits for 2023.

What is telehealth?

Telehealth is a patient and provider virtual interaction, or more defined, it involves health care services obtained remotely, without in-person contact. This can happen through video conferencing with a laptop, tablet or smartphone device.

An article on mayoclinic.org cites the following goals of telehealth:

- Make health care easier to get for people who live in remote or rural communities.
- Keep you and others safe if you have an infectious disease.
- Offer primary care for many health conditions.
- Make access to services easier for people who have limited mobility, transportation or time.
- Improve communication and coordination of care between health care team members and a person getting care.
- Offer advice for self-management of health care.

So where does this leave you as an NALC Health Benefit Plan member?

The NALC Health Benefit Plan High Option Plan introduced telehealth through a partnership with American Well (Amwell) several years ago. I am happy to report that our High Option members have embraced this option and continue to report high satisfaction levels.

When members use the Plan's telehealth service, they can receive care for minor acute conditions anytime, anywhere. Some of the most common treated conditions include:

- Allergies
- COVID-19 symptoms
- Flu

Nutrition counseling

Now included for High Option members is virtual nutrition counseling. Through Amwell, members can receive nutrition plans from a trained registered dietician for a variety of chronic conditions and/or health concerns. Included with this program are personalized meal plans and recipes, in addition to a video chat feature that allows the dietician to support patients by jointly reviewing food labels and suggesting strategies for success.

Appointments are available seven days a week, including evenings, and the best news yet: This program does not have a copayment. It's completely free to our members.

Women's health services

There's more. Since we are in the business of keeping our members healthy and this program is convenient and cost effective, we asked ourselves, why not add another option? Through the NALCHBP telehealth program, we now offer specialized and convenient care for women throughout every state of life, from prenatal and postnatal support to menopause care. Clinicians are able to provide virtual treatment for a variety of health concerns including birth control, endometriosis, premenstrual syndrome and breastfeeding support by board-certified lactation consultants.

With Women's Health Month right around the corner, I believe there is no better time than now to introduce

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Violations of the maximum work hour limits (continued)

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thermore, the employee's tour of duty shall be terminated once he or she reaches the 60th hour of work.

In Case No. A90N-4A-C 94042668 (C-18926), National Arbitrator Carlton J. Snow ruled that the language in M-00859 limits the remedy for any violations of the Article 8.5.G maximum hour limits to an additional premium of 50 percent of the base hourly straight time rate. Even though this MOU explicitly states that letter carriers who have reached their 12 and/or 60-hour limit must have their tour terminated, management frequently attempts to shield themselves from liability for the violation based on National Arbitrator Snow's decision. This attempt by management ignores their obligation to instruct letter carriers who have reached the work hour limitations to end their tour. Any grievance filed alleging a violation of M-00859 should address management's failure to live up to this language.

Union representatives should keep in mind that Arbitrator Snow's award only addresses the additional remedies sought by the NALC. His award did not modify the terms of our agreement in M-00859 and the terms remain fully enforceable.

The Contract Administration Unit has created multiple new grievance starters, reflecting each category of employee, to assist branches when filing grievances on repetitive violations of the daily and weekly work hour limits. Additionally, an interview questionnaire has been developed so each affected carrier can provide an individualized im-

pact statement. Shop stewards should include these statements in the grievance file to demonstrate the reasons and the need to request remedies that enforce the right of letter carriers to not work past these work-hour limits.

There have been several regional arbitration awards that addressed the repeat and deliberate violation of work-hour limits and the impact on letter carriers. While the remedies that have been awarded vary, numerous arbitrators agree that management has a contractual obligation to send carriers home once they reach the work-hour limits and/or allow the carrier the right to refuse without fear of discipline.

The awards in favor of the above remedies may be due to the ability of the union to show the negative impact these violations have on the letter carriers through statements and testimony. Local branches should file timely grievances on each circumstance where a carrier is forced to work beyond the hour limits as stated above. Until your office has a precedential award saying otherwise, you should follow whatever instructions your supervisor or manager gives you.

The parties have agreed to mandatory work-hour limits, and the Postal Service must honor them. In the end, time is a precious resource that cannot be recreated, and a remedy must be fashioned to prevent the violation from recurring.

To access the grievance starters, which include the interview questionnaire, from the NALC website, log on to the Members Only portal, and click the "Member documents" button, where you will find the *Shop Steward's Guide* and the grievance starters in a drop-down menu.

Director, Health Benefits

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you to this program. Telehealth visits are available for women 18 years of age or older, and like the prior program discussed, the telehealth women's health services program does not have a copayment.

How to start your telehealth journey

Go to nalchbptelehealth.org on your desktop computer or download the NALCHBP telehealth app from your phone or

tablet's Google Play™ or Apple App Store. Once the app is downloaded and opened, enter your name and email and create a password. Next, enter your health plan ID. Lastly, choose the reason for the visit, whether "Urgent Care," "Women's Health," "Lactation Support" or "Nutrition Counseling." Once your selection is made, an online doctor is just a click away.

Keep in mind that you can also download the free NALC Health Benefit Plan Member Access Portal that also includes a single sign-on feature for the NALCHBP Telehealth program.