

# Telehealth for Forensic Evaluations

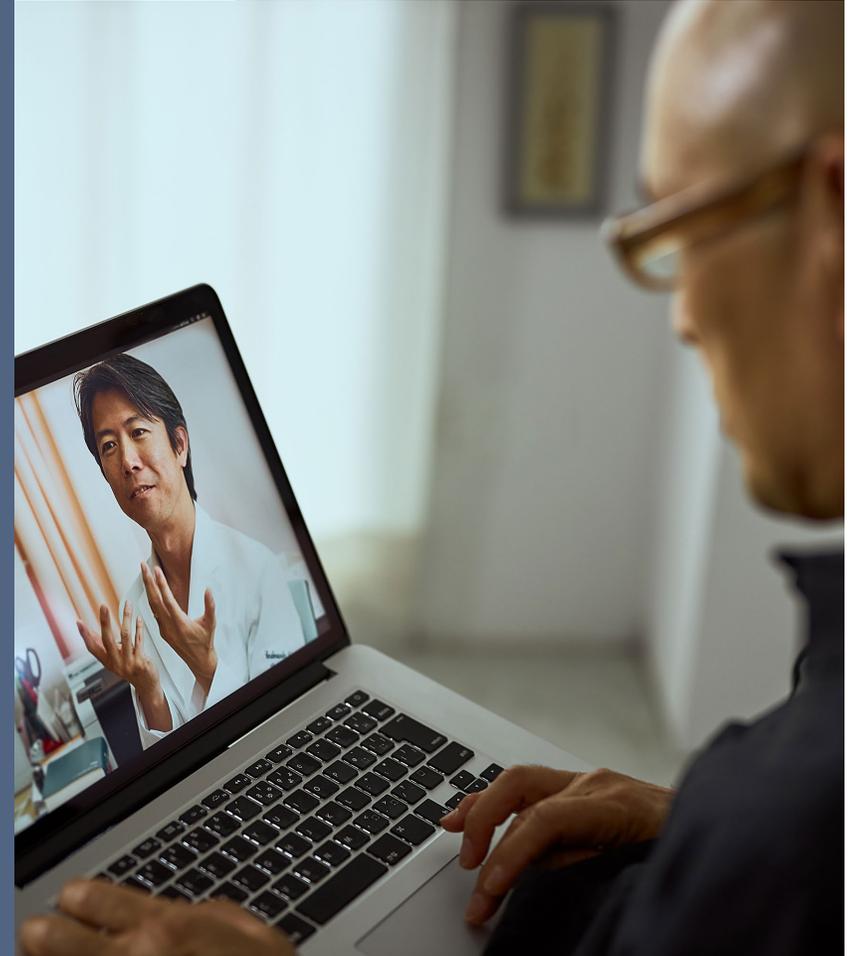
DSHS Office of Forensic Health Services

March 28, 2023



# Agenda

- Telehealth- a quick definition
- Telehealth in OFMHS
- Used for court ordered evaluations
- Pre-telehealth
- Telehealth pilot
- Current direction
- Benefits to jails
- Discussion



# What is Telehealth?

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) defines telehealth as **“the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support and promote long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, and public health and health administration.”** Technologies include video conferencing, email, text, streaming media, and landline and wireless communications.

[Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, FAQs on Telehealth and HIPAA during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency](#)



# Telehealth

- Connects people with their providers when clinically appropriate
- Can receive care/diagnosis, evaluation, consult with a provider or evaluator, get information about a condition or treatment, arrange for prescriptions, participate in court ordered evaluations
- Can expand the reach of services and improve efficiency by shortening delays in services and eliminating or reducing travel time and associated costs
- Particularly beneficial for people that live in geographically remote or underserved areas, including urban areas

[Washington State Telehealth Implementation Guidebook](#)  
[American Telehealth Association](#)

# Telehealth use in OFMHS

OFMHS uses telehealth to conduct forensic evaluations  
These evaluations are **Court ordered Evaluations**

*In our work forensic means relating to courts of law*

Evaluations include:

- Competency to stand trial evaluations
- Mental state evaluations like NGRI and diminished capacity



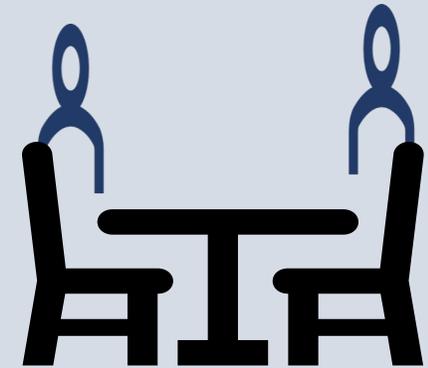
# Telehealth in OFMHS

## Prior to the use of telehealth in OFMHS

### Forensic evaluations were conducted in-person

In-person evaluations are resource heavy

- Participants needed to travel to the jail-  
the evaluator, defense attorney, and possibly other observers present
- The jail arranged for accommodations for all parties-  
for an interview ranging from 90 minutes to 4 hours  
providing a confidential interview space with the evaluatee



# Telehealth in OFMHS

## OFMHS then initiated a forensic telehealth Pilot

### Goals:

- To establish and evaluate secure video conferencing links between the jails and the forensic evaluators before broader expansion in WA
- To provide the capability for forensic evaluators to conduct evaluations from distant sites, which also allows attorneys and others to attend remotely
- To reduce DSHS professional visitation traffic into the jails

### 2018 –Pilot

- Funding identified for equipment and network install
- Sites selected and interlocal agreements established between DSHS and county jails
- DSHS system used was the Cisco Meeting Server technology

# Telehealth use in OFMHS

## What does it look like now?

- From those original sites we have worked with jails across the state to provide additional ways to use telehealth for conducting forensic evaluations.
- Many jails now have the capability to host evaluations through video conferencing technology.
- The evaluator, defense attorney, and possibly other observers are present via video
- Variations of hardware used (stationary setups, equipment on moveable carts, laptops, tablets)
- DSHS initiated Zoom or Teams sessions (limited use of CISCO meeting technology)
- DSHS telehealth committee formed to assist with new sites, upgrading existing technology, and to provide ongoing support

# Telehealth use in OFMHS

## Benefits to Jails with telehealth use

- Potential to move individuals with mental health conditions out of the jail facility sooner.  
(Individuals with mental health conditions can sometimes be more costly to house and may require more staffing)
- Fewer evaluators/attorneys entering and exiting the jail  
(reduced disruption to operations; minimize security concerns for in-person professional visitors and custody staff)
- Mobile equipment can allow evaluations in different locations  
(can reduce safety risk to officer or evaluatee due to not needing to escort- as well as not needing staff to escort)
- Flexibility of options when there are facility illness outbreak issues
- Straightforward consistent process, less confusion when there are new staff to set up connection
- Due process rights preserved as fewer obstacles to completing an evaluation
- Multiple uses for equipment

# Telehealth use in OFMHS

## Where are we headed?

- **Each jail is unique and we want to provide a unique solution**  
We want to work with each jail to figure out how to best adapt to your setup and resources
- **The telehealth committee has identified specific priorities**  
(legacy setup, high number of evaluations, considerations regarding travel time and distance)
- **We have developed a new turnkey solution**
  - Standardized hardware
  - Required pathway to the internet
  - Diverse/custom telehealth solutions (mobile cart, mounted equipment with anti-ligature enclosure)
  - Offers an 'always on' connection or instant on' connection and has low maintenance requirements with the ability for DSHS remote monitoring- Less need to schedule individual Team sessions
  - Reduced technological work and issues for jail staff, plug and play approach
  - Continuing to evolve as technology/needs change over time

# Discussion

## Video Conferencing for Forensic Evaluations

DSHS Office of Forensic Health Services  
March 28, 2023

