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PRESS RELEASE

[Caring for New York's School Children: The Potential of Telehealth](#)

NEW YORK CITY, New York, January 26, 2021: At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, many of New York State's 263 School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) quickly pivoted to telehealth, demonstrating its power to assure access to care for the 250,000 low-income school children they serve, whether it be in a pandemic, during snow days or over a school vacation. School-based health centers, offering comprehensive and convenient care, are often the only source of care available to these children in their communities. Particularly important and effective, the centers found, was the ability to address mental health care needs.

"Telehealth has played a vital role in responding to the pandemic, driving a rapid transformation in how care is delivered. Working together, we must ensure access to care for all who need it," stated Anna Mond Johnson, CEO of the American Telemedicine Association.

This new report, developed by a team of students from Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health and issued by the [NY School Based Health Foundation](#), explores what will be required to make expanded access permanent. It delves into issues of policy and reimbursement; services most appropriate for telehealth; choosing the right telehealth system; changes in operations, staffing and training; evaluation; barriers to access; and implementation models employed by three of the country's most successful states.

To reach the potential of telehealth, the report makes the following key points:

- New York State granted regulatory flexibility and telehealth reimbursement comparable to in-person services during the health emergency. Continuation of these policies is essential to longer term telehealth sustainability and will require successful state-level advocacy.
- SBHCs should invest now in HIPAA compliant systems before regulations change.
- Staff training in billing and coding and the redesign of workflows will be important to successful telehealth adoption.
- Low-income school children will continue to face barriers to telehealth services because of disparities in access to devices and stable, affordable internet access. Addressing this disparity will require SBHCs to join with educational and other groups in successful advocacy.

In addition to its research, the Columbia University team interviewed 19 key stakeholders, including nine New York SBHCs; the New York City Department of Education; Greater New York Hospital Association; Healthcare Association of New York State; Community Health Care Association of New York State; and the national School Based Health Alliance.

The full report is available at: www.nysbhfoundation.org/telehealth-and-sbhcs

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