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## Telehealth Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder in Missouri's Urban and Rural Areas Prior to and Since COVID-19

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Title: Telehealth Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder in Missouri's Urban and Rural Areas Prior to and Since COVID-19

Authors: Aurora Rojo, Rashmi Ghonasgi, Zachary Budes, PhD., Rachel Winograd, PhD

Abstract:

Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a chronic health condition that can be adequately treated when individuals have access to needed services. Telehealth services can be delivered remotely through audio-visual technological communications rather than in-person visits, which can greatly improve care accessibility. Following the onset of COVID-19, there were swift clinical and policy adaptations to promote telehealth services across medical and behavioral health fields. This study aims to identify changes in the frequency of telehealth for OUD treatment in Missouri's rural and urban counties prior to and since the onset of COVID-19. Chi-square tests and analysis of changes between years and across urban and rural counties demonstrated telehealth utilization was dependent on both year and rurality, with lower than expected utilization seen in Missouri's rural areas in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Instead, utilization of telehealth in urban areas was higher than would be expected in 2021 and 2022, compared to 2020. Statewide, there was a 31.8% increase in telehealth for OUD in 2021 and 2022 (combined), compared to total telehealth use in 2019 and 2020. However, there was an overall decrease of 27% in telehealth utilization in 2022, suggesting telehealth service delivery has begun to return closer to pre-pandemic levels. Findings from this study can contribute to the discussion of client preferences and treatment effectiveness related to telehealth services, as well as what barriers may prevent or facilitate treatment access for individuals living in rural areas.