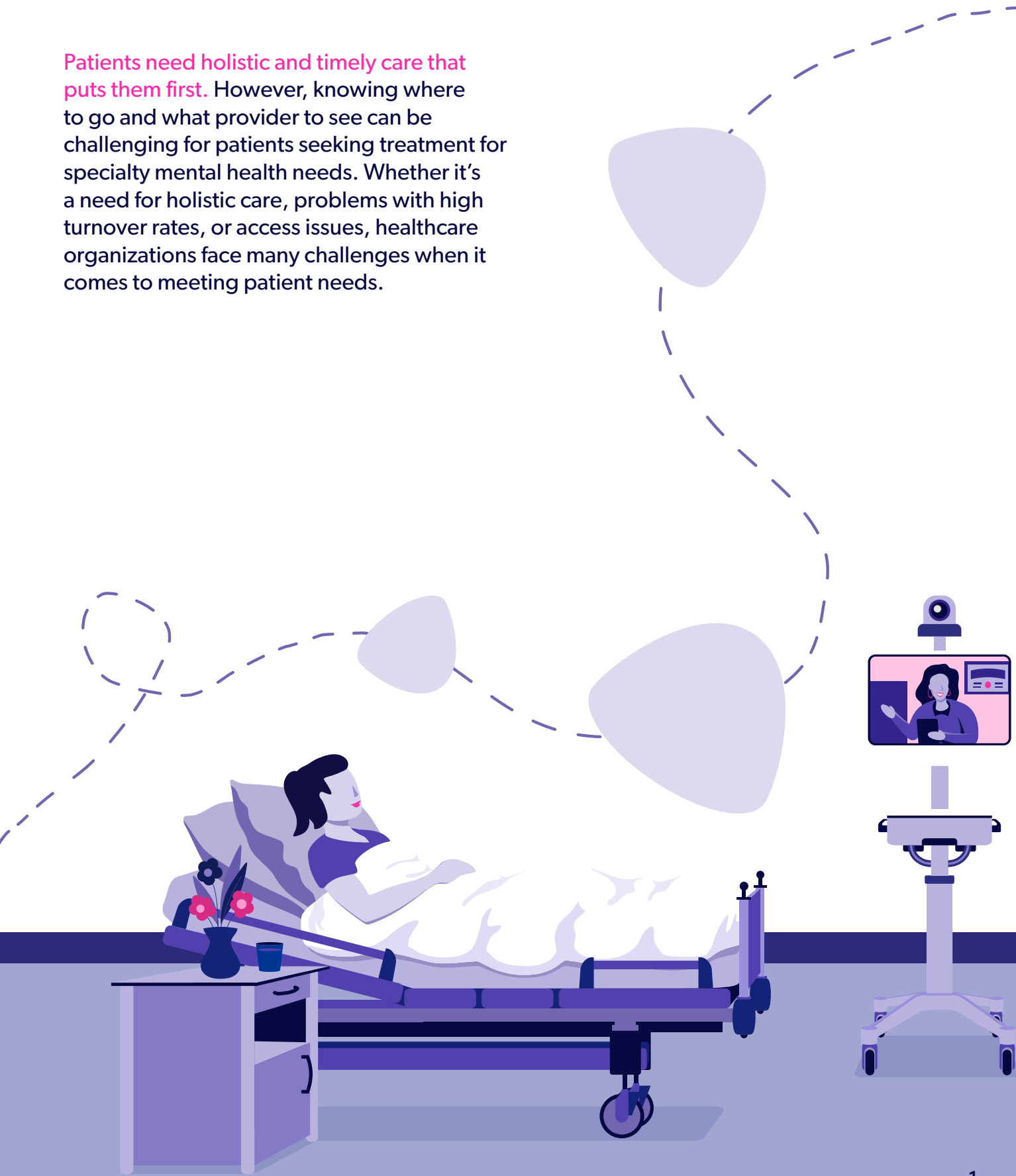


How Teletherapy Can Fit Into an Effective Behavioral Health Program

Patients need holistic and timely care that puts them first. However, knowing where to go and what provider to see can be challenging for patients seeking treatment for specialty mental health needs. Whether it's a need for holistic care, problems with high turnover rates, or access issues, healthcare organizations face many challenges when it comes to meeting patient needs.



Let's take a closer look at a few of the barriers healthcare organizations may face when working to address patient's mental health needs:

Lack of specialty care

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), 70% of primary care visits are related to psychological challenges such as anxiety, panic, depression, and stress¹. While a primary care provider (PCP) can prescribe medications for depression and anxiety, some patients need more in-depth engagement.

The most effective way to treat a mental health diagnosis is to engage in pharmacology paired with psychotherapy. These two approaches combined provide the most optimal patient outcomes.

Need for holistic treatment

Behavioral health treatment is broad and can help patients address their physical conditions in addition to their mental health conditions. In fact, the APA says that mental health and behavioral health services offered by qualified mental health professionals play a significant role in the prevention, diagnosis, management, and treatment of the leading causes of death in the U.S., including heart disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease.

With six in 10 adults facing a chronic condition², providing effective holistic care is essential. However, without a behavioral health program in place, healthcare organizations may struggle to effectively and holistically address chronic conditions, provide the right education, and help patients understand how their condition might be affecting their everyday lives.

High turnover rates

When healthcare organizations struggle to find the right provider match, they face high turnover, causing less continuity of care and higher no-show rates. Finding the right clinician for the long term is critical, especially during provider shortages. In fact, the National Library of Medicine predicts by 2024, the country will experience a shortage of between 14,280 and 31,091 psychiatrists³.

With these challenges at play, addressing mental health needs might feel daunting. However, by leveraging teletherapy through effective providers like licensed clinical social workers (LCSW), your organization will be well positioned to meet the high demand of mental health needs in your community.

1. Kristin M. Holland, P. D. (2021, April 1). Mental health, overdose, and violence outcomes and the COVID-19 pandemic. *JAMA Psychiatry*. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2775991>
2. Chronic Diseases in America. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention . (n.d.). Retrieved August 19, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/pdf/infographics/chronic-disease-H.pdf>
3. Weiner, S., (2022, August 9). A growing psychiatrist shortage and an enormous demand for mental health services. *AAMC*. Retrieved August 19, 2022, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/growing-psychiatrist-shortage-enormous-demand-mental-health-services>



What teletherapy brings to the table

Teletherapy providers like LCSWs are an invaluable part of any organization, delivering high-quality, value-based care to patients and providing invaluable support to the care team. When it comes to a holistic, long-term approach to care, having access to quality therapy or counseling services is of the utmost importance.

Let's take a look at a few of the reasons why LCSWs are such an impactful part of any team.

LCSWs understand systems, communities, and how to create connections

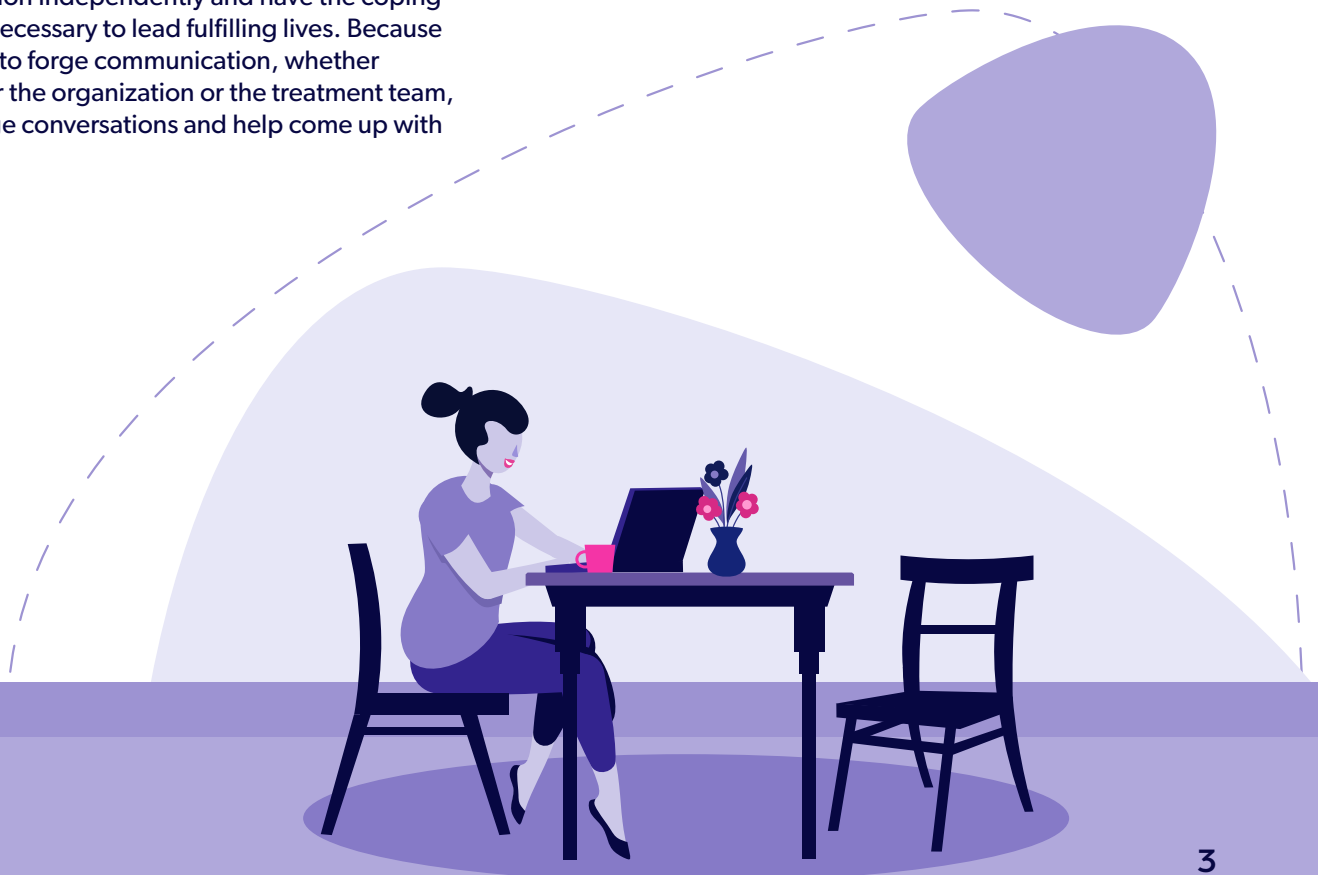
In the hospital or community health setting, LCSWs bring invaluable skills, resources, and knowledge to their teams. By increasing access, eliminating barriers, and improving engagement, LCSWs help set communities up for success.

LCSWs work diligently to get patients to a place where they can function independently and have the coping mechanisms necessary to lead fulfilling lives. Because of their ability to forge communication, whether advocating for the organization or the treatment team, they encourage conversations and help come up with solutions.

Behavior is the hardest thing to change, but LCSWs help make it possible

While LCSWs can help comfort patients, they also play a pivotal role in risk prevention. They can improve outcomes by educating patients and helping them understand how their behaviors might affect their health. Medical doctors may not have the time to provide that education, but a behavioral health specialist does.

For example, an LCSW can help patients understand their chronic conditions, why they might experience flare ups, and how their behaviors affect their condition. Even if the root of the problem isn't solved, it can help the person better manage their condition.



LCSWs help your organization connect all the dots

LCSWs can improve, impact, and change a patient's life by helping healthcare organizations create a web of support. LCSWs understand how communities work and how they can pull in different support systems and agencies to help support patients in the community.

For instance, unhoused individuals may not have access to many social supports. However, social workers can connect them with housing authorities, get them clothing through community connections, and help them sign up for programs like Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). If their child hasn't been in school, social workers can even look at strategies to help their children enroll in Head Start.

LCSWs also help healthcare organizations reduce recidivism. They help patients meet their baseline needs, help them develop coping mechanisms, move past trauma, and deal with things that have led them to their current situation. While this approach helps improve the patient's life, it also decreases the need for community provided resources and makes space for the next person who needs help.

A comprehensive skill set

LCSWs are highly-trained providers who can provide a wide variety of services, depending on their specialization. The two biggest categories for these specializations are micro and macro social work. In general, macro social is looking at the larger population and making a difference there, whereas micro social work is working with individuals or family units. In most cases, your organization will likely be looking at LCSWs who specialize in individuals or families.

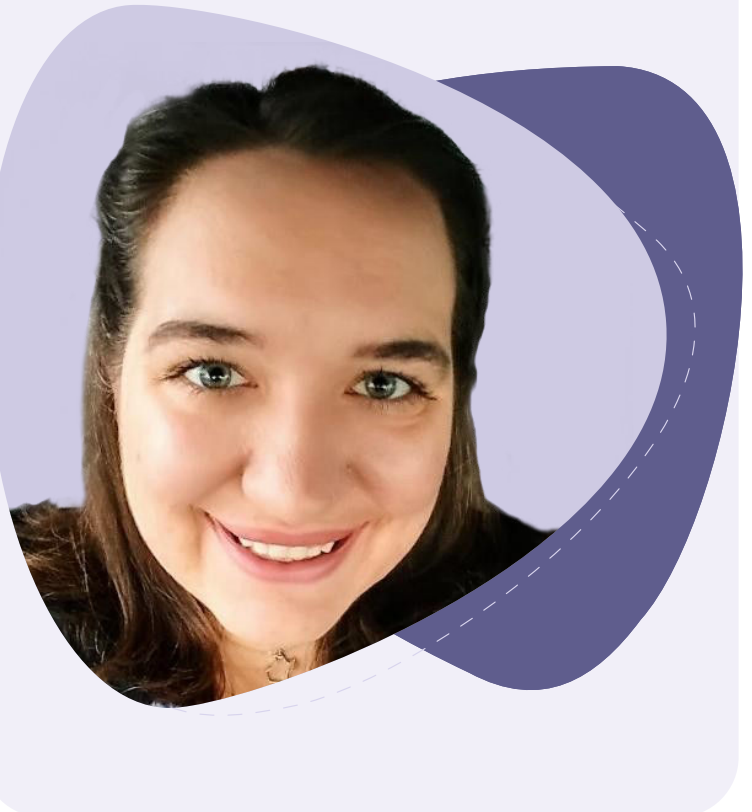
Because LCSWs deliver counseling and therapy services rather than psychiatric or medical services, they cannot prescribe. But, importantly, they can diagnose patients and they're familiar with the DSM-5.

The teletherapy spotlight

Meet Nicole Bradbury, LCSW



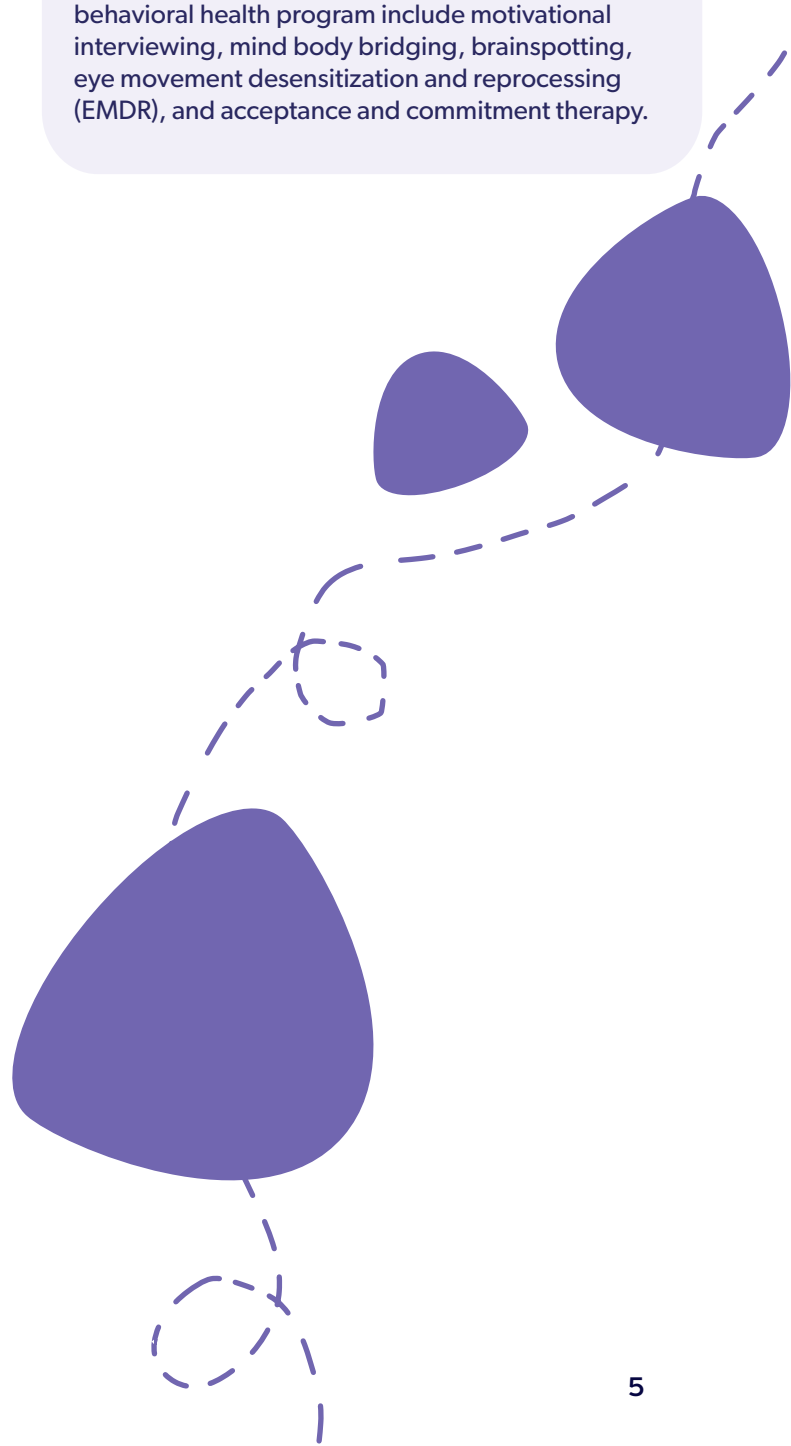
I feel like I'm constantly learning something new. For example, one thing I've learned is that in-person care and telehealth offer the same benefits. You can still build the same connection and rapport whether it's telehealth or in-person. In my own experience, telehealth is just as effective as in-person, and I'm sure studies show that as well.



4 Common treatment modalities that LCSWs specialize in include:

- 1. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**
Commonly referred to as “talk therapy,” CBT hones in on how thoughts and feelings influence behaviors — and how those behaviors can lead to psychological problems. LCSWs can utilize CBT methods to help patients identify and work through these thoughts and behaviors.
- 2. Crisis intervention model**
The crisis intervention model is commonly used for individuals experiencing crisis and trauma and consists of seven stages: Conducting a psychosocial assessment, rapidly establishing a rapport, identifying the crisis cause, enabling the patient to express their emotions, establishing safe alternatives for coping, creating an action plan, and following up with the patient.
- 3. Solution-focused therapy**
This treatment modality involves an LCSW working closely with a patient to identify a problem and create a solution plan based on that patient’s individual strengths. This short-term practice model helps individuals cope effectively with the challenges they’re facing.
- 4. Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT)**
DBT is a modified approach to CBT. The primary goals of DBT are to enable people to develop healthy ways to cope with stress, regulate their emotions, and improve their social relationships. While DBT was initially created to treat patients with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), it has proved effective for those experiencing eating disorders or substance use disorders.

Additional treatment modalities that LCSWs can utilize to benefit your healthcare organization’s behavioral health program include motivational interviewing, mind body bridging, brainspotting, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and acceptance and commitment therapy.



The teletherapy spotlight

The value of teletherapy during provider shortages

Teletherapy has an expansive reach and connects organizations with high-quality, specialty providers they wouldn't otherwise be able to access. If an organization in rural America needs a provider who practices within a particular specialty, they can virtually bring them into their clinic or hospital and provide valuable care to underserved populations.



How LCSWs fit into your organization's treatment strategy

Their ability to effectively diagnose patients makes LCSWs an effective first line of treatment or screening for health systems, outpatient clinics, and community health centers. Having LCSWs available for initial patient interactions is often more efficient for most healthcare organizations. Additionally, it's more cost-effective to have an LCSW on hand to manage less acute diagnoses that don't need medication management. Then, for more acute diagnoses, an LCSW would be able to refer the patient to a psychiatrist or PMHNP on your care team.

In most outpatient settings, LCSWs can function as part of a larger integrated care system where they need to provide access to counseling services and psychotherapy along with medication management and psychiatric care. Having LCSWs be the first line of defense in your treatment plan can be beneficial to pointing patients in the right direction and identifying the best path forward for their care plan.

From a behavioral health standpoint, it's hard to overstate the value an LCSW or counseling provider will bring to your organization. But it's important to find the right provider for your organization, your patient populations, and your goals. Opening yourself up to teletherapy providers can help you through that process.

Benefits of LCSWs in the ED

In the emergency department (ED) setting, LCSWs are critical to patient satisfaction and a hospital or health system's reputation in the community. Whether they're helping someone access food vouchers, connecting a patient to ancillary services, or talking with a patient's family members, LCSWs are thinking about the patient's holistic needs.



The teletherapy spotlight

The five biggest benefits for EDs working with a teletherapy vendor

1. Improved access to specialty care that might not otherwise be available
2. Better outcomes due to integrated behavioral health and primary care
3. Reduction in delayed care
4. Reduction in transportation barriers, such as lack of transportation or the need for long drives
5. Increased feelings of safety, security, and privacy

LCSWs often serve as a communication link between nurses, physicians, and other support staff. LCSWs can also support patient and family communication through their hands-on approach to care – including helping families understand a patient's illness and engaging with the family to help them feel supported after they leave the ED.

In the ED, LCSWs take ownership of the psychosocial dimensions of a person. These psychosocial dimensions include relationships, living situations, access to housing, finances, and food. These components are essential to the treatment formulation for patients in the ED.

Here are a few other ways LCSWs are impacting the ED

Follow-ups and planning

When a patient leaves the ED, it can be easy for them to fall through the cracks. However, when an LCSW is involved in their care, they provide follow-up and create a plan so the patient can avoid readmission.

The impact of holistic care

LCSWs approach care by looking at the person holistically and practicing cultural humility which says, "I don't know it all." LCSWs treat patients as individuals. They lead with empathy and understand the patient to be the experts and empower patients to make healthier choices.

Directing traffic

The ED often lacks resources, so a psychiatrist isn't always on hand. Despite this challenge, LCSWs can help determine the level of care needed. In the ED, LCSWs work alongside nursing to direct traffic. They review symptoms, resources, and the patient's biopsychosocial, and they'll assess on a frequent basis.

Whether in the ED or the community health spaces, social workers reinforce the rest of the team and bring everything together to give the patient the best care possible.



How LCSWs can help your organization build an effective integrated care model

As part of an effective integrated care model, a combination of medication management and psychotherapy is necessary. That means your organization will likely need to build up a program that includes therapists or counselors on staff — or potentially expand the counseling services you already have.

The teletherapy spotlight

When your clinician team is technically, culturally, and logistically well-integrated, your remote providers will feel and operate like an extension of your on-site team.

When remote care teams are integrated and work together smoothly, on-site providers, organizations, and patients can all benefit.

Here's how:

- Collaboration of care
- Addressing speciality mental health needs
- Increased patient comfort

Creating an integrated team of medical providers and mental health professionals is essential for the best possible patient care. That's partly due to medical providers and behavioral health specialists looking for two different things. Behavioral health specialists, like LCSWs, are looking at what might be causing the physical problem. For example, if a patient is telling their provider they can't sleep, an LCSW investigates what they might be dealing with at a holistic level. They might find that the patient is stressed because they're dealing with anxiety or lost a parent.

Because LCSWs bring a different perspective, they can help figure out the protective factors and support systems patients have in place that may be contributing to their overall health.

The power of cross-team collaboration

The collaboration between the medical team and the behavioral health specialist is critical. These teams work together to determine what type of community needs the patient has and while also validating the symptoms of a diagnosis. Often, patients might meet with their therapists weekly or bi-monthly. However, they're only meeting with their psychiatrist monthly or once every three months, depending on their stability.

Because of this cadence, psychiatrists often lean on LCSWs to catch changes because they see the patient more often. The psychiatrist can also depend on the LCSW because they are in good communication with the case manager who is helping the patient work through everything they need to find the safety and security they need to move forward.

LCSWs are also partnering with the medical team to do diagnostic work. The LCSW will conduct a full biopsychosocial assessment and pair it with the medical doctor or psychiatrist's history and physicals. Once equipped with all the information, they can formulate a realistic diagnosis.



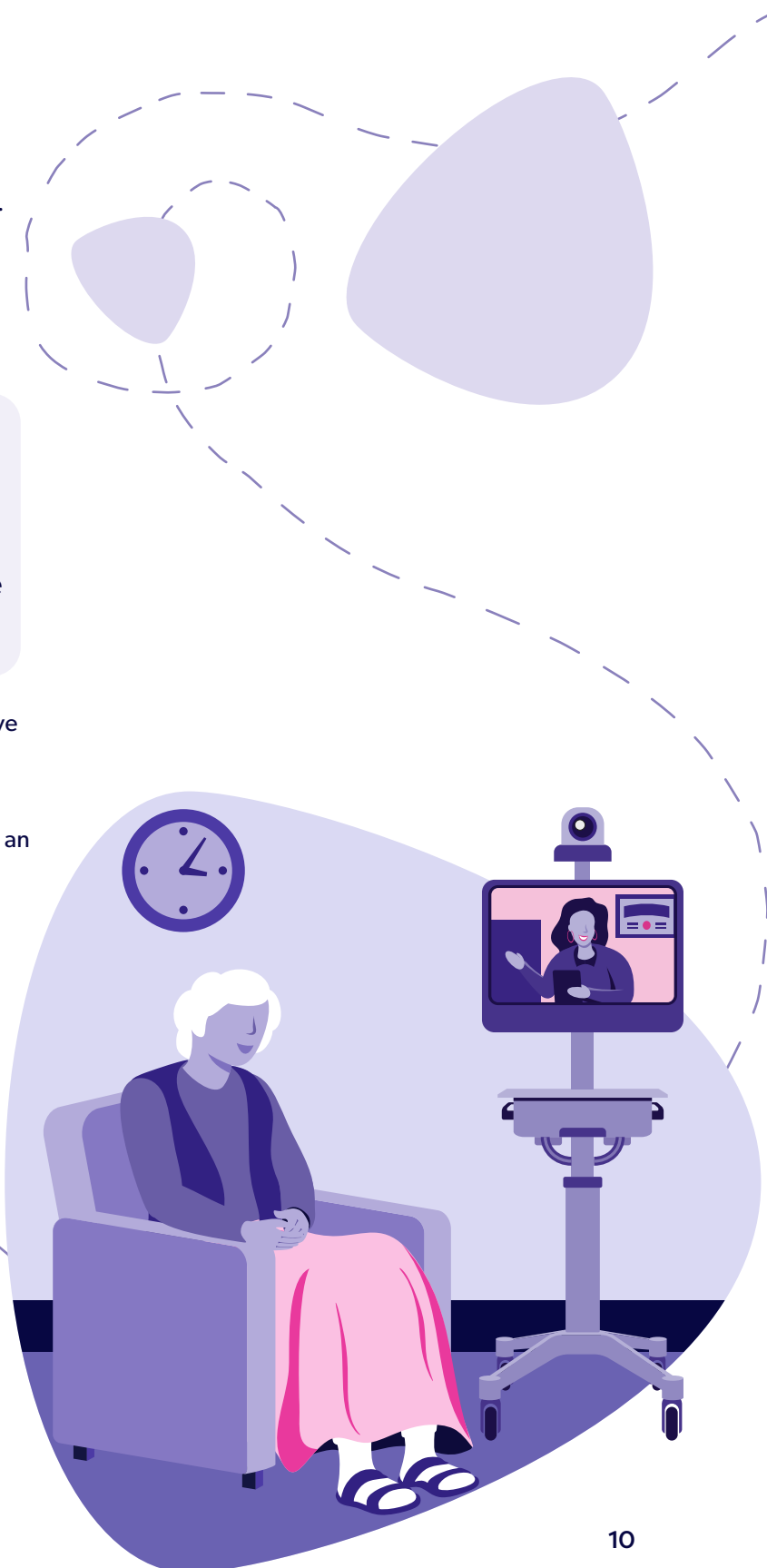
Integration in action

All clinicians bring something unique to the patient's care experience, and bringing a team of providers together only helps improve patient care. This care team might look like a behavioral health specialist, pharmacist, and medical doctor. Through integrated documentation, all providers are in the loop on what the other is doing to cut down on redundant care. This process helps keep the patient in the loop and helps them understand the "why" behind their treatment plan.

The teletherapy spotlight

85.52% of patients report that telemedicine has made getting the care they need easier.

When the whole care team works together to create a positive care experience for the patient, the individual gets the most effective treatment possible. Teletherapy makes getting this level of care a reality by matching your organization with the best provider fit for your patient population. Whether you're an ED or a community organization, teletherapy can help move you closer to meeting your behavioral health goals.



Why teletherapy services may be the best fit for your healthcare organization

There's no denying that, for an LCSW, the rapport they can create with a patient is key to that patient's improvement. But it's a common misconception that it's more difficult to build that connection over video. A well-trained LCSW can build just as strong a therapeutic relationship virtually as in person. Almost every in-person modality an LCSW can specialize in can be translated effectively in a virtual setting – including brainspotting and EMDR.

That means if your organization is cutting yourself off from engaging in teletherapy, you're limiting the quality of your program — and your ability to expand it.

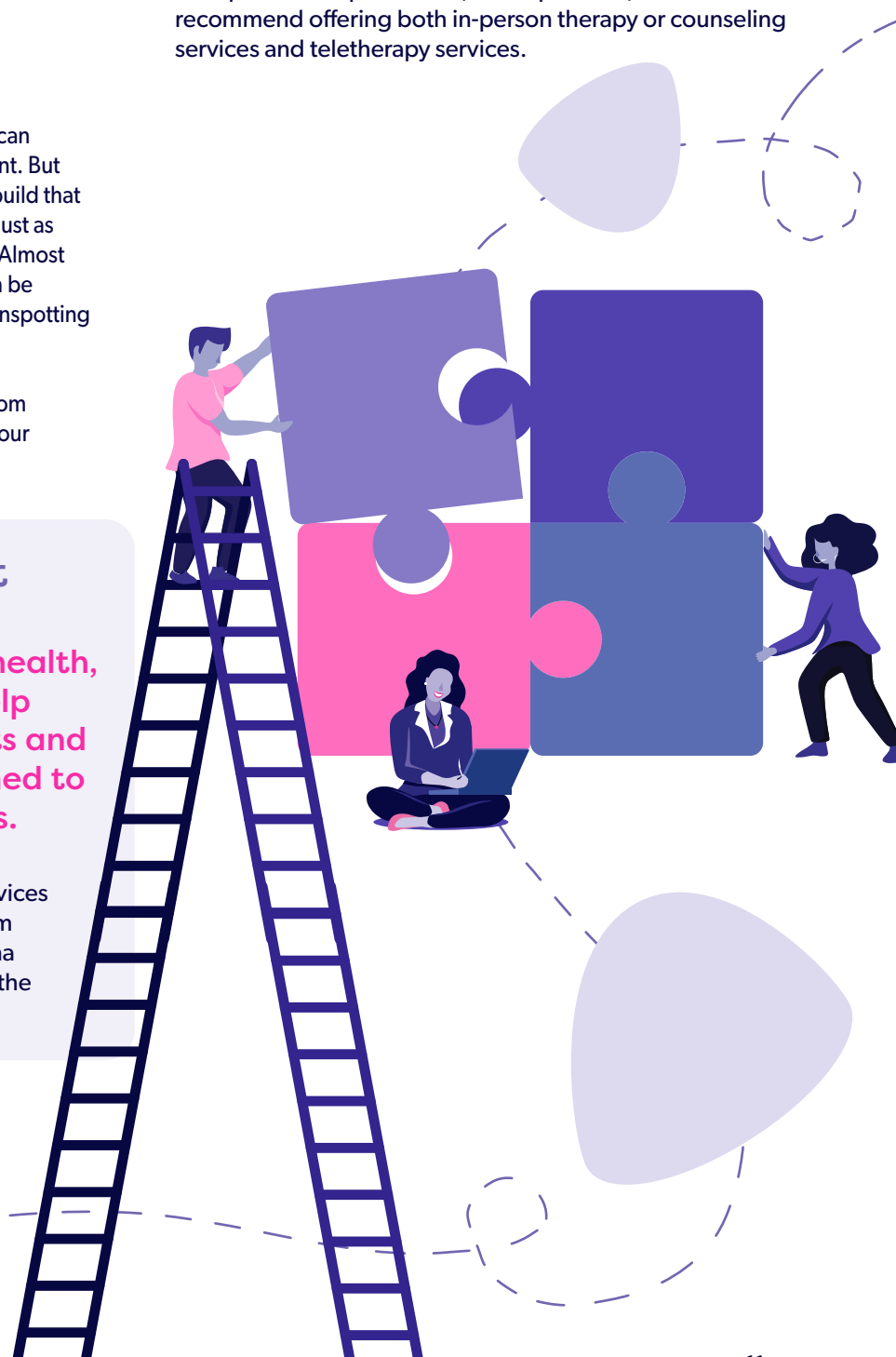
The teletherapy spotlight

Increasing access to behavioral health, through teletherapy, care can help diagnose and treat more patients and also help fight the stigma attached to having a mental health diagnosis.

Introducing and expanding behavioral health services into your CMHC, FQHC, hospital, or health system is an excellent first step towards eliminating stigma in your community and helping more people get the holistic care they need.

Additionally, embracing teletherapy in your organization means patients can take the session wherever they're most comfortable. With that freedom, some patients can be more willing to open up. The flexibility to choose their locations can also decrease no-show rates or open up access for people experiencing conditions that may make it difficult for them to feel motivated to leave their homes.

However, you may still have patients who prefer seeing their provider in person. So, when possible, we would recommend offering both in-person therapy or counseling services and teletherapy services.



Where Iris Telehealth fits in

At Iris Telehealth, we're proud to work with the best LCSWs in the industry to help ensure organizations and their communities have access to the most exceptional care possible. Through our provider matching process, we carefully vet every clinician so we can help secure a provider your team and patients love.

We understand that when we increase access to behavioral healthcare, we're improving outcomes, not only in mental health, but all areas of the healthcare system.

If you would like to learn more about how you jumpstart your own behavioral health program, [contact us today!](#)

