



March 9, 2021

The Honorable Jim Wood, Chair
Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 32 (Aguiar-Curry) Telehealth - SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Wood,

On behalf of the Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC), I am writing to express our support for AB 32 (Aguiar-Curry), which will expand access to healthcare for Californians by creating telehealth payment parity and by making the telehealth flexibilities implemented during the COVID-19 Pandemic permanent.

OTAC is a not-for-profit professional organization representing the interests of the approximately 18,000 licensed occupational therapy clinicians throughout California. Occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) work with people of all ages experiencing physical and behavioral health conditions or disabilities to develop, improve, or restore functional daily living skills, such as caring for oneself, managing a home, achieving independence in the community, driving, or returning to work. The provision of this type of care in facilitating and restoring everyday capacities in our patients optimizes participation in work and life for the citizens of California.

As millions of Californians have taken precautions over the past year to remain socially distant in order to combat COVID-19, the healthcare system has had to adapt to see and treat patients. At the beginning of the pandemic, occupational therapy visits dropped dramatically at all sites of service and the remainder shifted to telehealth. Although some in-person visits have resumed, a significant proportion of OT services are still being delivered via telehealth. OT services offered via telehealth include: home safety/modification evaluations, prevention and wellness services, ergonomic consultations, mental health/psychosocial interventions, and clinical services for those living with and managing chronic conditions. For pediatric clients, telehealth may be provided for consultations for feeding disorders, family training for children with autism or other complex conditions, and support for school-based occupational therapy services (AOTA, 2018). Much of occupational therapy telehealth practice is mental health – a critical need as Californians cope with the isolation and hardships created by COVID-19.

AB 32 will require the Department of Health Care Services to indefinitely extend the telehealth flexibilities granted within the Medi-Cal program during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It will also require Medi-Cal managed care plans to cover telehealth at the same rate as in-person treatment. OTAC is supportive of both of these expansions because they will further the ability of OTs and OTAs to provide telehealth treatment to eligible patients during and after the Public Health Emergency (PHE). Patients who would otherwise refrain from seeking necessary care can be effectively treated via telehealth, preventing unnecessary delays in recovery and complications that could lead to emergency department visits and hospital stays. Our healthcare system cannot afford

such additional stress now or in the future. AB 32 will ensure that telehealth services can continue to be offered to patients beyond the PHE, which will assist in mitigating the strain on our hospitals and health care facilities and keep Californians healthy. Additionally, it will allow for OT practitioners to provide services to clients within their natural environments (home, community, etc.) in an effort to foster independence and self-determination.

We thank you and the author for your leadership in ensuring continued access to healthcare for Californians through this critical public health crisis. We strongly support AB 32, which we believe will increase access to care. If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Snyder or Lindsay Gullahorn with Capitol Advocacy at (916) 444-0400 or jsnyder@capitoladvocacy.com or lgullahorn@capitoladvocacy.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bryant Edwards', written in a cursive style.

Bryant Edwards, OTD, MA, OTR/L, BCP, MPH
President

cc: The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Author
Members, Assembly Health Committee
Scott Bain, Principal Consultant, Assembly Health Committee
Gino Folchi, Assembly Republican Caucus