# Dear [insurance company]:

On behalf of the my [client population] and occupational therapy practitioners in Tennessee, I am writing to **respectfully request your company immediately begin to reimburse telehealth furnished by occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants to ensure that patients continue to have access to the habilitative and rehabilitative care they need amid the COVID-19 pandemic.** Currently, our clients must choose between following statewide shelter-in-place orders, or risking their health to travel to medically necessary therapy appointments.

The COVID-19 pandemic demands that health care providers and payers reconsider how care is delivered to reduce the risk of further spreading infection. Access to telehealth has become of paramount importance to ensure the safety of patients and their occupational therapy providers. The ability for occupational therapists (OT) and other healthcare providers to provide remote services is of the utmost importance as we navigate the changes that COVID-19 is requiring of the medical field. Governor Lee’s recent mandate has closed non-essential healthcare providers from providing outpatient services, such as ambulatory surgeries, dental services, or outpatient therapy services. While OT is considered an essential service, many practitioners and offices have closed their doors to comply with this mandate. This restricts access to essential therapy services for our state’s most vulnerable residents. Occupational therapists can provide our skilled therapy remotely while maintaining the safety of our patients. But we are kept from making these strides, as our teletherapy services are not covered, despite evidence showing that therapy services provided through telehealth are effective solutions for our patients.

Patients, as well as their occupational therapy providers, are being put at risk while seeking or providing health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, most federal and state actions that are increasing access to telehealth has been limited to physicians and do not consider the numerous other types of health care providers who can safely and effectively provide necessary medical care via telehealth.

Occupational therapy practitioners are critical health care providers. Among other things, occupational therapy plays an essential role in:

* Reducing the likelihood of falls, functional decline, emergency room visits, hospitalization or readmission;
* Decreasing the likelihood of contractures and joint deformities;
* Improving resistance to infection via movement and activities proven to enhance immunity;
* Combatting disruptions to mood as a result of social isolation;
* Addressing clients’ occupational deprivation and establishing habits, roles, and routines;
* Promoting participation in education, play, and learning in the home or school; and
* Increasing independence in occupations, thereby reducing the need for caregivers to be in close proximity to clients.

**Recommendation**

While rehabilitative services furnished via telehealth would not replace traditional clinical care, telehealth would be a valuable resource for occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants in expanding their reach to meet the needs of patients when and where those needs arise, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tennessee’s residents would benefit from lifting many of the current restrictions on telehealth services, including who can provide telehealth and where these services can take place. **We urge [your company] to cover telehealth services rendered by occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants, effective immediately, in order to stop restricting patient access to healthcare services.**

Such reforms would provide greater flexibility to providers and patients and increase access to care, especially to those living in rural or medically underserved areas or individuals living with impaired mobility. Modifying current payment policy and expanding coverage to include the delivery of telehealth by occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants will lead to reduced health care expenditures, increased patient access to care, and improved management of chronic disease and quality of life, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Patient geography and shelter-at-home orders no longer would be a barrier to receiving timely, appropriate medical care.

If you have any questions or would like to contact me, I can be reached at [your contact info].

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[your name and title]