

Creating Connections

Addressing the Needs of Children & Youth with Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities Using Telehealth

The Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program at the Washington State Department of Health is working to increase access to telehealth across Washington to counter gaps in early diagnosis and care for children with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities living in rural areas; from culturally and linguistically diverse families, including refugee and immigrant families; and from low-income families on Medicaid.

Project Purpose

- Improve access to interventions for children and youth with special health care needs.
- Provide supports and education to empower families to partner with health professionals in decision making.
- Strengthen state-level leadership and systems integration needed to ensure timely identification and access to services.

What Is Telehealth?

Telehealth utilizes technology, such as videoconferencing, to deliver virtual medical, health, and education services.

Challenges Moving Forward

Medicaid

Providers are confused about which billing codes they can use. Written guidance is limited to certain Medicaid provider guides, which adds to the confusion. In addition, there are five contracted Medicaid managed care plans that may or may not cover services and have different billing requirements. Policies restrict the use of store and forward for telehealth.

Private Insurance

There are laws that mandate that private insurance companies cover telehealth services. However, Washington does not yet have payment parity by law. Additionally, like Medicaid, there are nuances around referring providers, which restricts the use of store and forward telehealth.

Providers

Washington state professional licensing for physicians; advanced registered nurse practitioners; applied behavior analysis providers; and occupational, physical, and speech therapists appears to allow for services to be delivered via telehealth if the standards of care are met.

However, there are no uniform written rules governing all licensed care professionals related to telehealth. For example, there are Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) for physical therapy and telehealth but no published WAC for speech therapy.

Next Steps

- Continue to share our telehealth capacity assessment and strategic plan
- Identify and disseminate telehealth training for providers and for parents
- Partner with the Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center to leverage telehealth resources for training and guidance on technology
- Explore opportunities for small group providers to purchase low-cost business agreements for products, such as Zoom
- Look to the Washington State Telehealth Collaborative for guidance and leadership around telehealth legislation and policy
- Explore opportunities with licensing boards to consider developing telehealth rules
- Work with the Medicaid agency to ensure that there is easy-to-access interpreter services for services delivered via telehealth
- Develop a comprehensive telehealth family engagement strategy

Process

Reviewed Medicaid coverage.

Washington's Medicaid program does not provide explicit language around covering services if delivered via telehealth, which causes confusion for providers. The program covers many services that could be delivered via telehealth, including:

- Prenatal genetic counseling
- Applied behavior analysis program supervision and family training
- Services from registered dietitians
- Physical, occupational, and speech therapy

Staff at Washington's Medicaid agency reported that the language "medical provider" was used in the telehealth policy to leave the door open for the use of telehealth with the intent that the legislature would be able to expand telehealth services.

Supplemental Key Informant Interviews

Participants: providers (e.g., psychologists, physicians, and behavioral technicians)

Timeline: Spring 2017 – Summer 2018

Goal: Understand provider perceptions of telehealth

We learned providers want information on:



how to bill, getting reimbursed, and clarity on what is billable.



setting up telehealth training, including how to train staff to use telehealth.



standards of care for services delivered via telehealth.



how to access language interpreters.

Conducted a telehealth landscape assessment, including: a family and caregiver survey, a provider capacity assessment, and key informant interviews with a variety of providers.

Provider Capacity Assessment

Participants: 52 providers surveyed

- Neurodevelopmental centers
- Medicaid-designated centers of excellence for autism diagnosis
- Applied behavior analysis providers

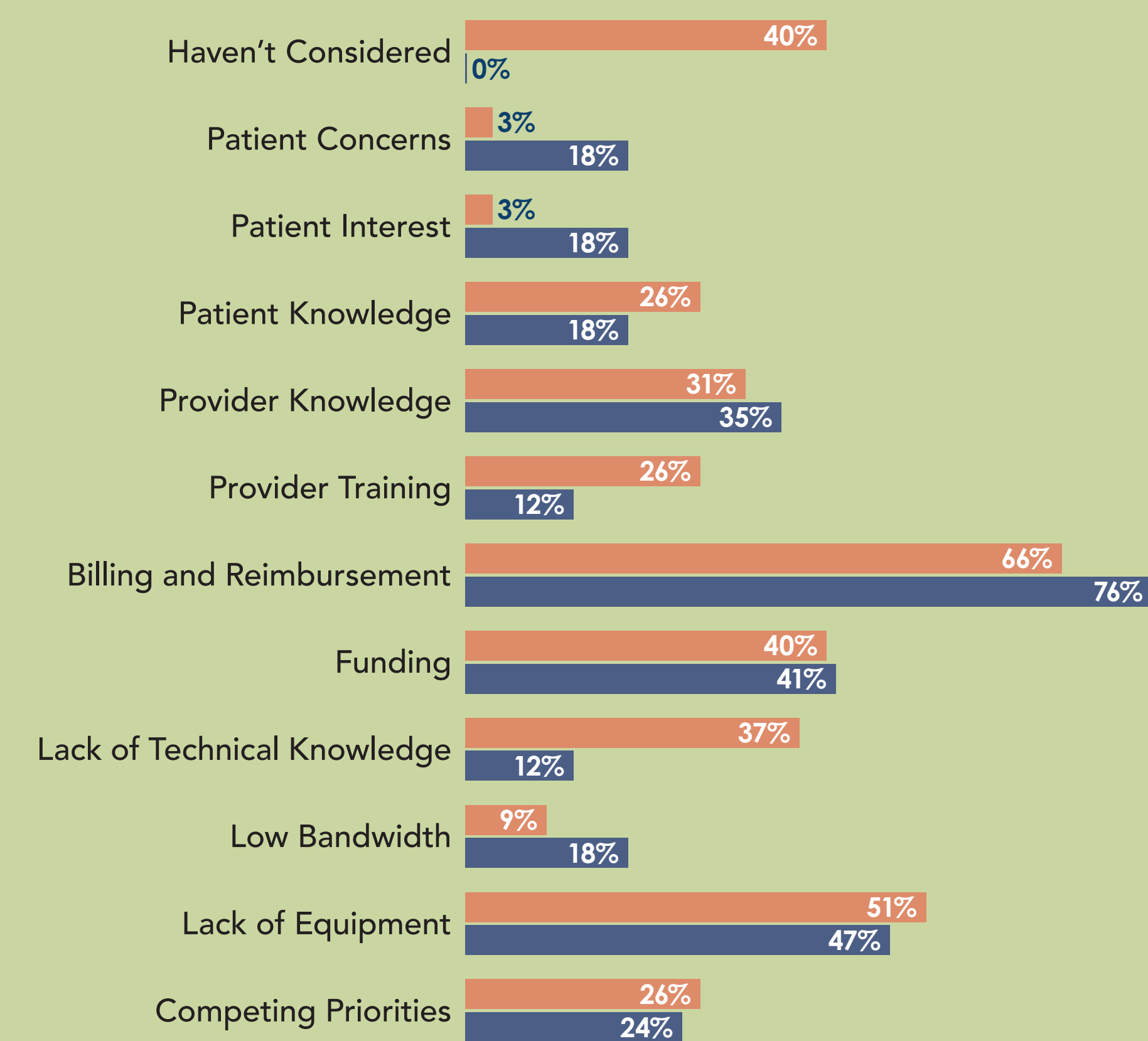
Timeline: Summer 2017

We wanted to understand:

- Provider's current capacity to offer telehealth services
- Challenges that limit their capacity
- Needed technical support around telehealth

33%
offered
telehealth
services

Top Barriers to Providing Telehealth



Family and Caregiver Survey

Can You Hear Me Now? Caregiver Perceptions of Telehealth for Improving Access to Care for Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities in Washington State was a mixed-methods formative evaluation including an online survey and follow-up interviews in both English and Spanish.

Participants: 118 caregivers

Timeline: Summer 2017

We wanted to understand:

- the barriers caregivers experience when trying to access services
- how caregivers perceive telehealth

7%
have used
telehealth
services

Child Demographics

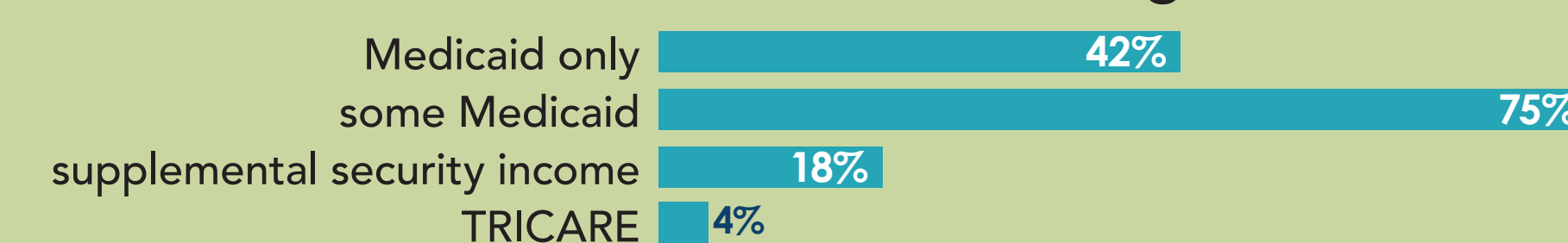


median
age



39%
children with autism behavior
analysis (ABA) prescription

Child's Insurance Coverage



Top Barriers to Care



55%
long waitlist/backlog

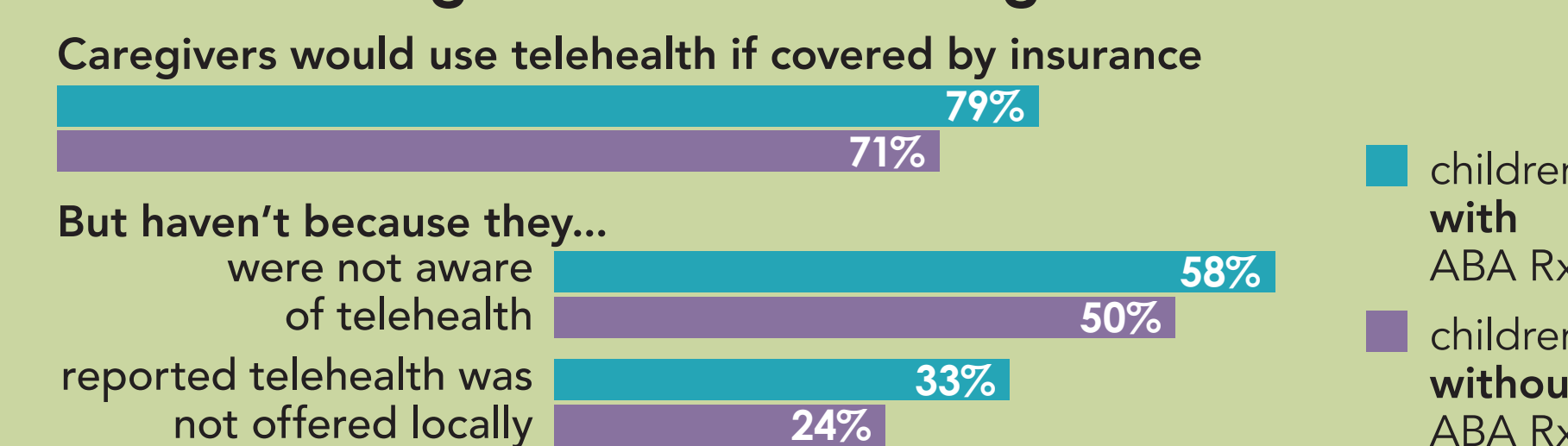


24%
lack of transportation



21%
insurance not accepted

Caregiver Interest in Using Telehealth



Developed a telehealth strategic plan.

Creating Connections Strategic Plan: Moving toward Telehealth Services for Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities represents a systems approach to increasing access to needed services through telehealth in Washington state.

See handouts to learn more.

Important Partnerships

- Telehealth ad hoc committee
- Seattle Children's Hospital
- Center for Connected Health Policy
- Providers
- Inland Health Northwest
- Northwest Region Telehealth Resource Center
- Statewide leaders in CYSHCN

Successes

- ★ Piloting applied behavior analysis parent training via telehealth at two different sites.
- ★ One neurodevelopmental center piloted the delivery of physical, occupation, and speech therapy services via telehealth in a rural area of the state.
- ★ Identified billing issues with Medicaid and helped implement Medicaid billing system changes so all providers get reimbursed when billing for covered services delivered via telehealth.
- ★ High levels of parent satisfaction with services delivered via telehealth.
- ★ Neurodevelopmental centers are engaged in learning about telehealth.
- ★ Provided learning session at 2018 Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) Conference.



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