Prescribing Controlled Substances by Telehealth: Legal FAQs

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The Alabama Board of Medical Examiners is charged with protecting the health and safety of the citizens of the state of Alabama.

> William M. Perkins, Executive Director

Alabama Board of Medical Examiners

Key Laws

Alabama's telehealth laws are codified at: Section 34-24-700, et seq.

- Section 34-24-701 Definitions
- Section 34-24-702 Licensure Requirements
- Section 34-24-703 Duties of the physician
- Section 34-24-704 Issuance of Legend and Controlled Prescriptions
- Section 34-24-705 Compliance with State and Federal Laws





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BME Declaratory Rulings

The Board has issued declaratory rulings since the passage of the state's telehealth laws interpreting its application to specific situations.

- April 27, 2023: Provision of Telehealth by Limited Licensees
- June 22, 2023: VA System Clinical Video Telehealth Protocol
- August 17, 2023: Contrast Injection under Remote Supervision





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Section 34-24-701 - Definitions

Originating site. The physical location of a patient at the time in which telehealth medical services are provided.

 $\underline{\text{Distant site}}. \text{ The } \underline{\text{physical location of a physician}} \text{ at the time in which telehealth medical services are provided.}$

<u>Telehealth</u>. The use of electronic and telecommunications technologies, including devices used for digital health, asynchronous and synchronous communications, or other methods, to support a range of medical care and public health services

<u>Telemedicine</u>. A form of telehealth referring to the provision of medical services by a physician at a distant site to a patient at an originating site via asynchronous or synchronous communications, or other devices that may adequately facilitate and support the appropriate delivery of care. The term includes digital health but does not include incidental communications between a patient and a physician.





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Frequently Asked Questions #1

Is there a special license just for telehealth?

Answer: No.

Section 34-24-702 – Licensure Requirements

Physicians who engage in the provision of telehealth medical services to any individual in Alabama must possess a full and active license to practice medicine in Alabama - this is the same license that every physician is issued.

The provision of telehealth medical services is deemed to occur at the patient's physical location (the "Originating Site") within Alabama at the time telehealth medical services are provided.





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Frequently Asked Questions #2 Are there exemptions to the licensure requirement? Answer: Yes.

Section 34-24-702 – Licensure Requirements

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Telehealth services that may not require an Alabama license:

(1) The physician is licensed in another state or D.C., and services are <u>irregular or infrequent</u> (telehealth medical services occurring <u>fewer than ten days in</u> a calendar year or involving <u>fewer than ten patients</u> in a calendar year; or

(2) Services are provided in consultation with an Alabama licensed physician, <u>limited to ten days in a calendar year</u>, or necessary medical care is provided to a patient being transported into Alabama.

Practitioners should consult an attorney with additional questions about when a license is required.





If the entire practice is telehealth, does someone have to physically see the patient?

Answer: It depends.

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Section 34-24-703 – Duties of the Physician

A physician has the same duty to exercise reasonable care, diligence, and skill whether providing services in-person or via telehealth, including when appropriate, to:

- Establish a diagnosis.
- Disclose the diagnosis and evidence for it.
- Discuss the risks and benefits of treatment options.
- Provide a visit summary to the patient and information on how to obtain appropriate follow-up and emergency care if needed.
- A physician-patient relationship must be established either at the initiation of the patient or referral by the patient's established physician.

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Section 34-24-703 – Duties of the Physician

Before providing telehealth medical services, the physician must:

- Verify the patient's identity;
- Require the patient to identify his or her physical location, including city and state;
- Disclose the identity and credentials of the physician and any other personnel; and
- Obtain the patient's consent for the use of telehealth and document it in the patient's medical record.





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Frequently Asked Questions #4 Are in-person visits necessary? Answer: It depends.

Section 34-24-703 – Duties of the Physician

In-Person Visit Requirement

If a physician or practice group provides telehealth services more than <u>four</u> times in a 12-month period to the same patient for the <u>same medical condition without resolution</u>, the physician shall either:

(1) See the patient in person within a reasonable amount of time, which shall not exceed 12 months; or

(2) Appropriately refer the patient to a physician who can provide the in-person care within a reasonable amount of time, which shall not exceed 12 months.

The provision of telehealth services that includes video communication to a patient at an originating site with the in-person assistance of a licensed physician, physician assistanc, certified registered nurse practitioner, certified nurse midwife, or other person licensed by the Alahama Board of Nursing shall constitute an in-person visit for this purpose. An LPC or LSW at the originating site does not meet this requirement.





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Mental Health Exemption to the In-Person Req

However, this provision shall not apply to the provision of mental health services as defined in Section 22-50-1. Ala. Code \S 34-24-703(f)(5).

<u>Definition of Mental Health Services</u>:

Diagnosis of, treatment of, rehabilitation for, follow-up care of, prevention of and research into the causes of all forms of mental or emotional illness, including, but not limited to, alcoholism, drug addiction, or epilepsy in combination with mental illness or an intellectual disability.





Declaratory Ruling of Apri	il 27, 2023: Provision of
Telehealth by Lim	ited Licensees

Question Presented: Where a teaching physician licensed under Ala. Code § 34-24-75(a) engages in telehealth services exclusively on behalf of the employing academic medical center and does not receive reimbursement outside his or her employment with the academic medical center for the service, may the limited licensed teaching physician provide telehealth services to an outside health care facility that has contracted with the academic medical center for those services?





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Declaratory Ruling of April 27, 2023: Provision of Telehealth by Limited Licensees

Answer: A teaching physician licensed under Ala. Code § 34-24-75(a) may provide telehealth services to an outside health care facility that has contracted with the teaching physician's employing academic medical center for those services if the physician is providing the telehealth services exclusively on behalf of the employing academic medical center and does not receive reimbursement outside of his or her employment with the academic medical center for the services.





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Declaratory Ruling of August 17, 2023: Contrast Injection under Remote Supervision

Question Presented: May a radiologic technologist who holds ARRT certification and registration administer contrast media via an intravenous injection to a patient in Alabama undergoing a Computed Tomography ("CT") or Magnetic Resonance Imaging ("MRT) diagnostic test pursuant to the order of a physician while (a) such radiologic technologist is under the remote supervision of an Alabama-licensed, board-certified radiologist who is virtually present in the office suite through audiovideo ("AV") real-time communications technology that enables the radiologist to be immediately available to furnish assistance and direction throughout the performance of the procedure and (b) an Alabama-licensed Registered Nurse ("RN") is physically present at the facility to accept real-time instructions from the supervising radiologist in order to provide appropriate treatment to the patient in the event patient experiences an adverse reaction to the contrast media?





Declaratory Ruling of August 17, 2023: Contrast **Injection under Remote Supervision**

Answer: A radiologic technologist who holds ARRT certification and registration may administer contrast media via an intravenous injection to a patient at an originating site in Alabama undergoing a Computed Tomography ("CI") or Magnetic Resonance Imaging ("MRI") diagnostic test pursuant to the order of a physician only when (a) such radiologic technologist is under the real-time apprevision of an Alabama-licensed, board-certified radiologist who is vitrually present in the office suite utilizing synchronous audio and visual real-time communications technology that enables the radiologist to observe, direct, and furnish assistance and direction to the radiologic technologist throughout the performance of the procedure; (b) an Alabama-licensed Registered Nurse ("RN"), Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner ("CRNP"), Physician Assistant ("PA"), or nor-adiologist physican who is appropriately trained to tent adverse reactions to contrast media is physically present at the originating site whenever contrast media is being administered by intravenous injection to a patient; (b) the originating is facility's policy and procedures includes a modality for the supervising radiologist to provide real-time instructions to the RN, (CRNP, PA, or other physician assigned to treat contrast-media reactions; and (d) the originating site facility is equipped with the emergency supplies, equipment, and drugs necessary to treat a contrast media reaction.





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Frequently Asked Questions #5

Can I initiate controlled substance prescribing via telehealth if I am a MD/DO?

Answer: Yes.

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Section 34-24-704 – Issuance of Legend and **Controlled Prescriptions**

A prescriber may prescribe a legend drug, medical supplies, or a controlled substance via telehealth if the prescriber is authorized to do so under state and federal law. A prescription for a controlled substance may only be issued via telehealth if:

- (1) The telehealth visit includes synchronous audio or audio-visual communication using HIPAA-compliant equipment with the prescriber;
- (2) The prescriber has had at least one in-person encounter with the patient within the preceding 12 months;
- (3) The prescriber has established a <u>legitimate medical purpose</u> for issuing the prescription within the







Section 34-24-704 – Issuance of Legend and Controlled Prescriptions

The in-person encounter may be satisfied by the in-person assistance of personnel licensed by the Board of Medical Examiners or Board of Nursing at the originating site when the prescriber is evaluating the patient from a distant site using video communication.

. An LPC or LSW at the originating site does not meet this requirement.





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Declaratory Ruling of June 22, 2023: VA System Clinical Video Telehealth Protocol

Question Presented: Whether the Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) protocol utilized by the Birmingham VA HealthCare System (BVAHCS) meets the "in-person" requirement found under Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1)b? This provision governs when a controlled substance may be prescribed following a telehealth visit and requires, in pertinent part, the prescriber to have had "at least one in-person encounter with the patient within the preceding 12 months." Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1)b.





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Declaratory Ruling of June 22, 2023: VA System Clinical Video Telehealth Protocol

Answer: The "in-person" requirement found at Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1)b may be satisfied by the in-person assistance of personnel licensed by the Board of Medical Examiners or the Board of Nursing at the originating site when the prescriber is evaluating the patient from a distant site using video communication. Therefore, the Board opines that the CVT protocol is an acceptable approach to meeting the requirement, as stated in Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1)b, for an in-person encounter between a prescriber and the patient to whom a controlled substance is being prescribed if the staff member who is physically present with the patient for the appointment check-in and check-out is a licensee of the Board of Medical Examiners or the Board of Nursing.





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Question Posed to the Board:

"Whether the "in-person" encounter that has been conducted for a patient by an initial prescriber as required under Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1) hmust be repeated by a subsequent prescriber in order to continue to prescribe that patient a controlled substance via a telemedicine visit within the same 12-month period, when the latter prescriber, like the former, is treating the patient under the auspices of our company and within our offices?"

The Board is of the opinion that a subsequent prescriber in the same practice or physician group, of the <u>same or similar</u> <u>specialty</u> as the previous prescriber in that practice group, may continue to prescribe a controlled substance to a patient based upon an "in-person" examination by the previous prescriber.





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Guidance Letter Issued August 2024

- · Each provider has full access to the records of the patients they are seeing, including all documentation from any previous encounters with other providers.
- The covering or subsequent prescriber would have full access to the documentation of the "in-person" evaluation that
 was performed for the same patient with the same condition(s) within the preceding 12 months.
- Protocols are in place for patients who will be seen via telemedicine to continue receiving treatment in the event that
 their original prescriber is unable to see them.
- The Board acknowledges the apparent conflict between Ala. Code § 34-24-704(b)(1)b and established, safe medical practice and issues this guidance as a temporary accommodation.





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Telehealth is a Modality, not a Different Standard of Care

Answer No. Neither the CSA nor DEA regulations require a practitioner to see a patient every 30 days. Nonetheless, the CSA and DEA regulations do require that a prescription for a controlled substance to be effective must be issued for a legitimate medical purpose by in individual practitioner acting in the usual course of his professional practices. See 2 CER 1806.V4(a), as DEA has previously stated, "practitioners who prescribe controlled substances must see their potates in an appropriate time and manner as on the met their obligation to prescribe only for a legitimate medical purpose in the usual course of professional practice and to thereby minimize the likelihood that patients will obuse, or become addicted to, the controlled substances. "Sustance of Audigie Prescriptions for Schedule # Controlled Substances, 72 FR 6492 (64936 (2007), EO-DEA993, June 23, 2020





Telehealth is a Modality, not a Different Standard of Care	
H. G.L.G. C. MANEY	
Ala. Code Section 34-24-703(a) A physician providing telehealth medical services shall owe to the patient the same duty to exercise reasonable care, diligence, and skill as would be applicable if the service or procedure were provided in person. Telehealth medical services shall be governed by the Medical Liability Act of 1987, codified in Sections 6-5-540 through 6-5-552, and shall be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction and venue of the circuit	
courts of the State of Alabama, regardless of the citizenship of the parties.	
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Frequently Asked Questions #6	
Can I prescribe controlled substances via telehealth if	
I am a CRNP/CNM/PA?	
Answer: Yes.	
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Alabama Board of Medical Examiners 22	
Frequently Asked Questions #7	·
Can I prescribe to my existing patient while they are	
in another state?	
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Answer: Probably not.	
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Ì	Licensure I	Requirement	ts in Ot	her States
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All states require a physician to be licensed in that state in order to practice medicine there. Because most states define the practice of medicine to occur where the patient is physically becaused. If your patient is in another state when the telemedicine visit occurs, you must be licensed in that state unless the state provides for a limited exception.

Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi all require a physician to be licensed in that state to perform a telemedicine visit while a person is in that state. The residency of the person does not alter this requirement.

Florida provides an exception for a true emergency. All four states permit an unlicensed physician to consult with a physician licensed in that state via telehealth, but this consult exception does not permit the unlicensed physician to treat the patient.

Florida issues a free telehealth registration to permit physicians to practice via telehealth only. A holder of this free registration <u>may not</u> issue a prescription for a Schedule II controlled substance.

Georgia issues a telehealth license that prohibits physical practice in GA, chronic pain practice, and the issuance of prescriptions for Schedule II controlled substances.



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Frequently Asked Questions #8

Can I prescribe <u>controlled</u> weight loss medications via telemedicine?

Answer: Probably not.

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Ala. Admin. Code R. 540-X-17-.03

(2) A written prescription or a written order for any controlled substance for a patient for the purpose of weight reduction or treatment of obesity shall be signed by the prescribing physician on the date the medication is to be dispensed or the prescription is issued for any controlled substance for a against for the purpose of weight reduction or treatment of obesity, the prescribing physician must sign and authorize the transmission of the electronic controlled substance for approached as the purpose of weight reduction or treatment of obesity, the prescribing physician must sign and authorize the transmission of the electronic controlled substance for approached requirements for Electronic Prescriptions for Controlled Substances (See 21 CFR Parts 1300, 1304, 1306 and 1311, as amended effective June 1, 2010). Such prescriptions or orders shall not be called into a pharmacy by the physician or an agent of the physician.

(3) The prescribing/ordering physician shall be present at the facility when he or she prescribes, orders or dispenses a controlled substance for a patient for the purpose of weight reduction or treatment of obesity.





Ala. Admin. Code R. 540-X-17-.03

(1) Only a doctor of medicine or doctor of osteopathy licensed by the Medical Licensure Commission of Alabama may order, prescribe, dispense, supply, administer or otherwise distribute a controlled substance in Schedule III, IV or V to a person for the purpose of weight control, weight loss, weight reduction, or treatment of obesity, except that a Physician Assistant, Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner or Certified Nurse Midwife may prescribe non-controlled drugs for such purpose, If a Physician Assistant, Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner or Certified Nurse Midwife prescribes non-controlled drugs for weight reduction or the treatment of obesity, the prescriber shall comply with the guidelines and standards of this Chapter which apply to MDs and DOs.





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Frequently Asked Questions #9 Can I prescribe testosterone via telemedicine? Answer: Should you?

Ala. Admin. Code R. 540-X-17-.03



Does the Federal DEA waiver permit an out of state physician to prescribe controlled substances to an Alabama patient without possessing an ACSC/QACSC/LPSP?

Answer: No.

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Section 34-24-705 – Compliance with State and Federal Laws

(a) A physician who provides a telehealth medical service shall comply with all federal and state laws, rules, and regulations applicable to the provision of telehealth medical services, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability and Health (HIPAA), and shall use devices and technologies in compliance with these laws, rules, and regulations. A physician who provides telehealth medical services shall also take reasonable precautions to protect the privacy and security of all verbal, visual, written, and other communications involved in the delivery of telehealth medical services.





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Section 34-24-705 – Compliance with State and Federal Laws

Requirement to Maintain Medical Records:

A physician who provides telehealth services must maintain complete and accurate medical records, must have access to
the patient's medical records, and must be able to produce records upon demand by the patient, the Board of Medical
Examiners, or the Medical Licensure Commission.

Medical Licensure Commission Rule 545-X-4-.08(2)(e):

(e) Retention and Access by Physicians Practicing Telemedicine. Physicians who practice medicine via telemedicine have
the same duty as all other physicians to adhere to these rules relating to medical records. Physicians who provide care via
telemedicine must retain access to the medical records which document their delivery of health care services via
telemedicine. A physician who is unable to access and produce the medical records documenting his or her practice of
medicine via telemedicine upon demand for inspection or review by the Board of Medical Examiners or Medical
Licensure Commission shall be in violation of Code of Ala. 1975, §34-24-360(2) and (23).





What is the DEA doing with telehealth?

Answer: The FBI, DEA, and HHS have task forces focused on health care fraud. The DEA has rules published for comment addressing telehealth.

Frequently Asked Questions #11



Founder/CEO and Clinical President of Digital Health Company Arrested for \$100M Adderall Distribution and Health Care Fraud Scheme

"As alleged in the indictment, the defer stimulants by exploiting telemedicine and spending millions on deceptive advertisements or social media. They generated over \$100 million in revenue by arranging for the prescription over 40 million pills," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "These charges are the Justice Department's first criminal drug distribution prosecutions related to telemedicine prescribing through a digital health company. As these charges make clear, corporate executives who put profit over





Frequently Asked Questions # 11



Justice Department Charges Dozens for \$1.2 Billion in Health Care Fraud

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DEA announced 3 new rules to make permanent some temporary telemedicine flexibilities established during the COVID-19 public health emergency while also establishing new patient protections.

• These rules do not apply to telemedicine visits in which a patient has already been seen in-person by a medical provider. Once a patient has had an in-person visit with a medical provider, the medical provider may prescribe any medications through telemedicine indefinitely. Also, if a telemedicine visit does not involve a patient being prescribed medications, then the telemedicine rules do not apply. Patients can always have telemedicine visits with medical providers. These rules only apply if a patient has never been seen in-person by the medical provider and the patient is being prescribed controlled medication.





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Frequently Asked Questions # 11

DEA Rule on Buprenorphine delayed with a new effective date of December 31, 2025.

- Addresses situations where a prescriber is issuing an Rx to a patient to treat OUD by telemedicine where the
 prescriber has not previously conducted an in-person medical evaluation.
- Prescriber must review the patient's PDMP for the state in which the patient is located during the telemedicine
- encounter.

•	May only prescribe an initial six-month supply of buprenorphine (split amongst	several prescriptions	totaling
ca	lendar months) through audio-only means.	A STATE OF THE STA	A Samuel

DEA Rule on Buprenorphine delayed with a new effective date of December 31, 2025.

- Additional prescriptions can be issued under other forms of telemedicine as authorized under the Controlled Substances Act, or after an in-person medical evaluation is conducted.
- . The pharmacist must verify the identity of the patient prior to filling a prescription.
- This regulation does not affect practitioner-patient relationships in cases where an in-person medical evaluation has previously occurred.



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Frequently Asked Questions #11

 $\underline{DEA\ Rule\ on\ Telehealth\ Registration}\ (Comment\ period\ ended\ March\ 18,2025)$

The rule proposes to create three types of Special Registration:

 $(1) Telemedicine \ Prescribing \ Registration, authorizing \ qualified \ clinician \ practitioners \ to \ prescribe \ Schedule \ III-V \ controlled \ substances.$

(2) Advanced Telemedicine Prescribing Registration, authorizing qualified specialized clinician practitioners to prescribe Schedule II-V controlled substances.

(3) Telemedicine Platform Registration authorizing qualified covered online telemedicine platforms, in their capacity as platform practitioners, to dispense Schedule II-V controlled substances.

The rule also provides heightened prescription, recordkeeping, and reporting requirements





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Frequently Asked Questions # 11

DEA Rule for Prescribing Controlled Substances within the VA System
• Effective February 18, 2025

• This rule authorizes Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) practitioners acting within the scope of their VA employment to prescribe controlled substances via telemedicine to a VA patient with whom they have not conducted an in-person medical evaluation. VA practitioners are permitted to prescribe controlled substances to VA patients if another VA practitioner has, at any time, previously conducted an in-person medical evaluation of the VA patient, subject to certain conditions.





Resources

Board Website: www.albme.gov

- Rules: Rules and Laws | Alabama Board of Medical Examiners & Medical Licensure Commission
- Practice Issues & Opinions | Alabama Board of Medical Examiners & Medical Licensure Commission (albme.gov)
- Investigations & Misconduct | Alabama Board of Medical Examiners & Medical Licensure Commission (albme.gov)
- Reporting | Alabama Board of Medical Examiners & Medical Licensure Commission (albme.gov)

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