

CORPORATE PAYMENT POLICY 24: TELEPHONE-ONLY SERVICES

Creation Date: March 2020

Most Recent Update: October 30, 2023

Next Review Date: On or before December 31, 2024

Effective Date: January 01, 2024

Description

This payment policy was originally implemented on a temporary/emergency basis in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy has since been revised in accordance with the Vermont Department of Financial Regulation (DFR) Order in Docket No. 23-011-I (*In Re: Coding and Reimbursement for Audio-Only Telephone Services Required by Act 6 of 2021*).

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont (Blue Cross VT) reserves the right to implement, modify, and revoke this policy without the contractual sixty-day (60) notification for a change in policy that is normally required in provider contracts. Notice of changes to the policy will be communicated to providers via a notice on Blue Cross VT's provider website.

Blue Cross VT's Payment Policy on Telemedicine (CPP_03) continues to apply for services rendered via HIPAA-compliant audio and video means. This policy addresses services that are provided **via telephone only**.

Policy & Billing and Documentation Guidelines

To the extent any of the individuals accepting patient calls are working remotely, those individuals should take precautions to protect the privacy of protected health information.

Blue Cross VT will pay for telephone calls between a physician/qualified health care professional and a patient (or parent of a patient for individuals under the age of 12) when:

- The physician/qualified health care professional believes the patient's needs require an office visit AND
- It is not in the best interest of the patient to be seen in the office AND
- The condition for which the patient is calling can be handled over the phone in a manner consistent with the current standard of care AND
- Video/Audio Telemedicine using HIPAA-compliant equipment is **not** available.

The physician/ qualified health care professional is responsible for:

- Obtaining verbal or written consent from the patient or the patient’s adult representative for the use of the telephone to conduct an “office visit”¹
- Documenting patient consent in the patient’s medical record
- Advising the patient that when the visit converts over to an “office visit,” it will be billed to Blue Cross VT

Billing the visit using one of the following options:

- Telephone-only evaluation and management code:

Code(s)	Place of Service (POS)	Use of -93 Modifier	Use of -V4 Modifier
CPT® codes 99441, 99442, or 99443	99 [Other]	Required: -93 modifier must be billed in first modifier position.	Not allowed.

- Codes other than telephone-only E/M:

Code(s)	Place of Service (POS)	Use of -93 Modifier	-V4 modifier
See Attachment 1 Coding Table other than CPT® codes 99441, 99442, or 99443	-99 [Other]	Optional; informational only; if billed, the modifier must be placed in the 2 nd modifier position	Required: -V4 modifier must be billed in the first modifier position to indicate the claim is being performed via telephone only.

The -V4 modifier allows 75% of the current in-person reimbursement rate. Blue Cross VT will audit all claims to ensure the correct modifier is being applied based on the criteria listed above, and Blue Cross VT will recover any claims

¹ Note that 18 V.S.A. §9361 requires a provider delivering health care services through telemedicine to obtain and document a patient’s oral or written informed consent for the use of telemedicine technology prior to delivering the services to the patient. Blue Cross VT assumes the same consent is expected to be obtained for services delivered via telephone only. Note, however, that section 26 of Act 6 (2021) has waived the requirement to obtain and document this consent through March 31, 2022, if “not practicable” under the circumstances.

where the appropriate modifier is missing, or the incorrect modifier was utilized. The -V4 modifier **must be** billed in the **first** modifier position as noted above.

- Respecting the patient who requests the phone call remain a phone call and not be documented or billed as an office visit.
- Documenting the phone call in accordance with standard requirements including the following:
 - Documentation that the patient has been informed this is considered an office visit
 - History of the present illness
 - Review of systems
 - Past medical history, allergies, medications, social history as applicable
 - Any documentation of photographs or other emailed or otherwise obtained information
 - Diagnosis, plan, and medical decision making
 - If the code being billed has a timed component, the time spent with the patient needs to be documented in the medical record.
- Using telephone calls only for visits that fall within the standard of care and that can be reasonably and safely handled over the telephone. The list of codes Blue Cross VT considers to be appropriate for telephone-only service are listed in Attachment 1 to this policy.

Not Eligible for Payment

Any services delivered pursuant to the terms of this policy should be appropriate for delivery through telephone-only means. Services that are not appropriate for delivery through telephone-only means may be denied.

Eligible Services

Please see the coding table provided as Attachment 1 to this policy.

Benefit Determination Guidance

Payment for services delivered via telephone-only means is determined by the member's benefits. It is important to verify the member's benefits **prior** to providing the service to determine if benefits are available or if there is a specific exclusion in the member's benefit.

Eligible services are subject to applicable member cost sharing such as co-payments, co-insurance, and deductible.

Federal Employee Program (FEP): Members may have different benefits that apply. For further information, please contact FEP customer service or refer to the FEP Service Benefit Plan Brochure. It is important to verify the member's benefits **prior** to providing the service to determine if benefits are available or if there is a specific exclusion in the member's benefit.

Inter Plan Programs (IPP): In accordance with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association's Inter-Plan Programs Policies and Provisions, this payment policy governs billing procedures for goods or services rendered by a Vermont-based provider (Blue Cross VT is the local Plan), including services rendered to out-of-state Blue members. Provider billing practices, payment policy and pricing are a local Plan responsibility that a member's Blue Plan must honor. A member's Blue Plan cannot dictate the type of claim form upon which services must be billed, codes and/or modifiers, place of service or provider type, unless it has its own direct contract with the provider (permitted only in limited situations). A member's Blue Plan cannot apply its local billing practices on claims rendered in another Plan's service area. A member's Blue Plan can only determine whether services rendered to their members are eligible for benefits. To understand if a service is eligible for payment, it is important to verify the member's benefits **prior** to providing services. In certain circumstances, the member may be financially responsible for services beyond the benefit provided for eligible services.

Claims are subject to payment edits that are updated at regular intervals and generally based on Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®), Health Care Procedural Coding System (HCPCS), Internal Classification of Diseases, CMS National Correct Coding Initiative Edits, Specialty Society guidelines, etc.

Eligible Providers

This policy applies to all providers/facilities contracted with the Plan's Network (participating/in-network) and any non-participating/out-of-network providers/facilities.

Audit Information:

Blue Cross VT reserves the right to conduct audits on any provider and/or facility to ensure compliance with the guidelines stated in the payment policy. If an audit identifies instances of non-compliance with this payment policy, Blue Cross VT reserves the right to recoup all non-compliant payments.

Legislative Guidelines

See Vermont Department of Financial Regulation (DFR) Order in Docket No. 23-011-I (*In Re: Coding and Reimbursement for Audio-Only Telephone Services Required by Act 6 of 2021*)

Related Policies

Blue Cross VT Corporate Payment Policy CPP_03 - Telemedicine

Document Precedence

The Blue Cross VT Payment Policy Manual was developed to provide guidance for providers regarding Blue Cross VT payment practices and facilitates the systematic application of Blue Cross VT member contracts and employer benefit documents, provider contracts, Blue Cross VT corporate medical policies, and Plan's claim editing logic. Document precedence is as follows:

- 1) To the extent that there may be any conflict between the Blue Cross VT Payment Policy Manual and the member contracts or employer benefit documents, the member contract or employer benefit document language takes precedence.
- 2) To the extent that there may be any conflict between the Blue Cross VT Payment Policy Manual and provider contract language, the provider contract language takes precedence.
- 3) To the extent that there may be any conflict between the Blue Cross VT Payment Policy Manual and corporate medical policy, the corporate medical policy takes precedence.
- 4) To the extent that there may be any conflict between the Blue Cross VT Payment Policy Manual and the Plan's claim editing solutions, the Plan's claim editing solution takes precedence.

Policy Implementation/Update Information

This policy was originally implemented on an emergency/temporary basis effective March 13, 2020, and it will continue to be reviewed at regular intervals.

The June of 2020, update was updated to reflect an end-date of December 31, 2021.

The August 1, 2020, update makes certain minor language changes, adds information about the telephone-only evaluation and management codes, and extends the end date for the policy.

The December 2020, updates (effective January 1, 2021) extend the end date for the policy, move the policy to new letterhead, update the reference to the DFR Emergency rule, add CPT® code 99417, delete CPT® code 99201, and update the descriptors for CPT® codes 99202-99205 and 99212-99215.

The October 2021, update (effective January 1, 2022) reflects changes to comply with DFR Order in Docket No. 21-026-I.

The January 2022, update (effective January 1, 2022) clarifies that the -93 modifier may be listed as informational.

The March 2022, update (effective April 1, 2022) (1) adds the following codes: 90785, 90849, 90853, 96110, 96127, 96160, 96161, 97151, 97152, 97153, 97154, 97155, 97156, 97157, 97158, 99497, 99498; and (2) removes the following codes: 90833, 90836, 90838, 98960, 98961, 98962, 99495, 99496; and (3) clarifies when the -V3 and -V4 modifiers should be billed.

The December 6, 2022, update (effective January 1, 2023) extends the policy through December 31, 2023, to comply with DFR order Docket No. 22-019-I, updates all references to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont (BCBSVT) to be Blue Cross VT, removes Dr. Plavin signature line and replaces with Dr. Weigel signature line, and add a note to Appendix 1 related to AMA and CMS changes.

The February 13, 2023, update reflects the following (1) removes codes 90849, 90853, 90863, 96127, +97151, 97152, 97153, 97154, 97155, 97156, 97157, 97158, 99202, 99203, 99212, 99213, 99441, 99442, and 99443 as of May 1, 2023 and (2) adds the following codes from Appendix "T" retroactively to January 1, 2023 – 90833, 90836, 90838, 90839, 90840, 90845, 92507, 92508, 92521, 92522, 92523, 92524, 96116, +96121, 96156, 96158, +96159, 96164, +96165, 96167, +96168, 96170, and +96171.

The June 22, 2023, policy maintenance to remove the references and language for services removed effective May 1, 2023: 90849, 90853, 90863, 96127, +97151, 97152, 97153, 97154, 97155, 97156, 97157, 97158, 99202, 99203, 99212, 99213, 99441, 99442, and 99443 (per the February 13, 2023, changes noted above).

The October 30, 2023 (Effective 01/01/2024), to comply with DFR Docket No. 23-011-I, updates are as follows, removed language of using -V3 modifier and updated guidance on the use of -V4 modifier. Added the following codes 90853, 96127, 99441, 99442, 99443, G0108, G0109, G0446, G0447, S9443, T1013.

Approved by

Update Approved: October 31, 2023



Tom Weigel, MD, Chief Medical Officer

Attachment 1 Coding Table

Please Note: Codes may not be all inclusive as the AMA and CMS code updates may occur more frequently than policy updates.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.			
Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	+ 90785	Interactive complexity (List separately in addition to the code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90791	Psychiatric diagnostic evaluation	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90792	Psychiatric diagnostic evaluation with medical services	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90832	Psychotherapy, 30 minutes with patient.	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 90833	Psychotherapy, 30 minutes with patient when performed with an evaluation and management service (List separately in addition to the code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90834	Psychotherapy, 45 minutes with patient.	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	+ 90836	Psychotherapy, 45 minutes with patient when performed with an evaluation and management service (List separately in addition to the code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90837	Psychotherapy, 60 minutes with patient.	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 90838	Psychotherapy, 60 minutes with patient when performed with an evaluation and management service (List separately in addition to the code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90839	Psychotherapy for crisis; first 60 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 90840	Psychotherapy for crisis; each additional 30 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary service)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90845	Psychoanalysis	Non-Covered
CPT®	90846	Family psychotherapy (without the patient present), 50 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	90847	Family psychotherapy (conjoint psychotherapy) (with patient present), 50 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	90853	Group psychotherapy (other than of a multiple-family group)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	92507	Treatment of speech, language, voice, communication, and/or auditory processing disorder; individual	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	92508	Treatment of speech, language, voice, communication, and/or auditory processing disorder; group, 2 or more individuals	Non-Covered
CPT®	92521	Evaluation of speech fluency (eg, stuttering, cluttering)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	92522	Evaluation of speech sound production (eg, articulation, phonological process, apraxia, dysarthria);	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	92523	Evaluation of speech sound production (eg, articulation, phonological process, apraxia, dysarthria); with evaluation of language comprehension and expression (eg, receptive and expressive language)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	92524	Behavioral and qualitative analysis of voice and resonance	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96040	Medical genetics and genetic counseling services, each 30 minutes face-to-face with patient/family	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96110	Developmental screening (eg, developmental milestone survey, speech and language delay screen), with scoring and documentation, per standardized instrument	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as **Medically Necessary** when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	96116	Neurobehavioral status exam (clinical assessment of thinking, reasoning and judgment, [eg, acquired knowledge, attention, language, memory, planning and problem solving, and visual spatial abilities]), by physician or other qualified health care professional, both face-to-face time with the patient and time interpreting test results and preparing the report; first hour	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 96121	Neurobehavioral status exam (clinical assessment of thinking, reasoning and judgment, [eg, acquired knowledge, attention, language, memory, planning and problem solving, and visual spatial abilities]), by physician or other qualified health care professional, both face-to-face time with the patient and time interpreting test results and preparing the report; each additional hour (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	96127	Brief emotional/behavioral assessment (eg, depression inventory, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] scale), with scoring and documentation, per standardized instrument	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96156	Health behavior assessment, or re-assessment (ie, health-focused clinical interview, behavioral observations, clinical decision making)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96158	Health behavior intervention, individual, face-to-face; initial 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 96159	Health behavior intervention, individual, face-to-face; each additional 15 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary service)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96160	Administration of patient-focused health risk assessment instrument (eg, health hazard appraisal) with scoring and documentation, per standardized instrument	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	96161	Administration of caregiver-focused health risk assessment instrument (eg, depression inventory) for the benefit of the patient, with scoring and documentation, per standardized instrument	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96164	Health behavior intervention, group (2 or more patients), face-to-face; initial 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 96165	Health behavior intervention, group (2 or more patients), face-to-face; each additional 15 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary service)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96167	Health behavior intervention, family (with the patient present), face-to-face; initial 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	+ 96168	Health behavior intervention, family (with the patient present), face-to-face; each additional 15 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary service)	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	96170	Health behavior intervention, family (without the patient present), face-to-face; initial 30 minutes	Non-Covered

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	+ 96171	Health behavior intervention, family (without the patient present), face-to-face; each additional 15 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary service)	Non-Covered
CPT®	97802	Medical nutrition therapy; initial assessment and intervention, individual, face-to-face with the patient, each 15 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	97803	Medical nutrition therapy; re-assessment and intervention, individual, face-to-face with the patient, each 15 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	97804	Medical nutrition therapy; group (2 or more individual (s)), each 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99406	Smoking and tobacco use cessation counseling visit; intermediate, greater than 3 minutes up to 10 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99407	Smoking and tobacco use cessation counseling visit; intensive, greater than 10 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	99408	Alcohol and/or substance (other than tobacco) abuse structured screening (e.g., AUDIT, DAST), and brief intervention (SBI) services; 15–30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99409	Alcohol and/or substance (other than tobacco) abuse structured screening (e.g., AUDIT, DAST), and brief intervention (SBI) services; greater than 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99441	Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 5-10 minutes of medical discussion	Blue Cross VT Requires: -93 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	99442	Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 11-20 minutes of medical discussion	Blue Cross VT. Requires: -93 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99443	Telephone evaluation and management service by a physician or other qualified health care professional who may report evaluation and management services provided to an established patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service or procedure within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment; 21-30 minutes of medical discussion	Blue Cross VT Requires: -93 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
CPT®	99497	Advance care planning including the explanation and discussion of advance directives such as standard forms (with completion of such forms, when performed), by the physician or other qualified health care professional; first 30 minutes, face-to-face with the patient, family member(s), and/or surrogate	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
CPT®	99498	Advance care planning including the explanation and discussion of advance directives such as standard forms (with completion of such forms, when performed), by the physician or other qualified health care professional; each additional 30 minutes (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)	Blue Cross Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
HCPCS Level II	G0108	Diabetes outpatient self-management training services, individual, per 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
HCPCS Level II	G0109	Diabetes outpatient self-management training services, group session (two or more), per 30 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
HCPCS Level II	G0446	Annual, face-to-face intensive behavioral therapy for cardiovascular disease, individual, 15 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.

The following codes will be considered as Medically Necessary when delivered via audio-only means when applicable criteria have been met and within the scope of the provider's practice.

Code Type	Number	Description	Instructions
HCPCS Level II	G0447	Face-to-face behavioral counseling for obesity, 15 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
HCPCS Level II	S9443	Lactation classes, nonphysician provider, per session	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
HCPCS Level II	T1013	Sign language or oral interpretive services, per 15 minutes	Blue Cross VT Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
MODIFIER	-V4		Apply to services rendered via telephone only. Requires: -V4 modifier billed in first modifier position.
MODIFIER	-93	Synchronous Telemedicine Service Rendered Via Telephone or Other Real-Time Interactive Audio-Only Telecommunications System	Required with CPT® codes 99441, 99442, or 99443: -93 modifier billed in first modifier position. When billed in combination with the -V4 modifier: Optional; informational only; if billed, the modifier must be placed in the 2 nd modifier position