



## POLICY OPTIONS IN BRIEF

**Option:** Direct the Board of Pharmacy to work with DBHDS to develop a process by which opioid treatment programs may be allowed to dispense OUD treatment medications from mobile units (Option 1, page 13).

**Option:** Direct DHCD to include broadband access services for mobile health clinics as a priority for broadband adoption programs (Option 2, page 17).

**Option:** Establish a grant program supporting mobile health clinics that provide services in rural and underserved areas (Option 3, page 19).

# Extending Health Care Access: Mobile Health Clinics

## FINDINGS IN BRIEF

### **Mobile health clinics increase patient access to care by removing costs, distance, and administrative barriers**

Mobile health clinics effectively fill gaps in the health care landscape, serving a wide range of vulnerable and underserved populations that lack access to regular health care services. As a flexible health care delivery model, mobile health clinics can tailor the services they provide in response to community needs. By removing cost, distance, and administrative barriers, they may capture patients who may not have sought care otherwise.

### **Mobile health clinics could be used to expand access to opioid treatment**

Patients receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment for opioid use disorder require frequent clinic visits for medication management, therapy, and drug screenings. The treatment schedule can be difficult for patients without reliable transportation or accommodating work schedules. There is some evidence that patients who receive OUD treatment medication through mobile programs have similar or improved treatment retention compared to patients at fixed-site clinics. A few treatment centers in Virginia allow patients to get buprenorphine prescriptions at their mobile health clinics. DBHDS has received federal approval for mobile methadone clinics and plans to begin operations in the future.

### **Logistical challenges, staffing shortages, and lack of reliable funding make mobile health clinic operations difficult**

The small, contained nature of mobile health clinics is a strength for taking health care where it is needed, but presents its own set of challenges. Staff must manage vehicle maintenance, weather, parking, and safety considerations that affect operations. Additionally, the kinds of services mobile health clinics can offer is highly dependent on vehicle size, staffing, funding, and the availability of broadband. Addressing internet deployment and adoption gaps would help mobile health clinics facilitate telehealth and expand access to services, particularly in rural areas.

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