



IBLCE Advisory Opinion on Telehealth

Background

IBLCE® has received several inquiries regarding the provision of lactation consulting services via telehealth, particularly in light of COVID-19, and whether such services can be offered in accordance with IBCLC practice.

Guiding practice documents include the [*Scope of Practice for International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® \(IBCLC®\) Certificants*](#) (dissemination and effective date December 12, 2018), the [*Code of Professional Conduct for IBCLCs*](#) (effective November 1, 2011 and updated September 2015), and the [*Clinical Competencies for the Practice of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants \(IBCLCs\)*](#) (dissemination and effective date December 12, 2018). As is a common practice of certification boards on matters of significance, IBLCE is issuing an Advisory Opinion on this matter. This Advisory Opinion is meant to provide guidance to the IBCLC on professional practice as it relates to telehealth.

IBCLC Practice Guiding Documents

[*Scope of Practice for International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® \(IBCLC®\) Certificants*](#) (dissemination and effective date December 12, 2018)

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants must act within the confines of the *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs*. This Scope of Practice defines the activities in which IBCLCs can engage based upon their education and the authority granted to certificants by the organisation having jurisdiction over their certification. The purpose of acting within the Scope of Practice for IBCLCs is to protect the public by assuring that all IBCLCs provide safe, competent, and evidence-based care. The *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs* is applicable in any country or setting where IBCLCs practice.

[Code of Professional Conduct for IBCLCs](#) (effective November 1, 2011 and updated September 2015)

IBCLCs are personally accountable for acting consistently with the Code of Professional Conduct, or CPC, to safeguard the interests of clients and justify public trust. The CPC informs both IBCLCs and the public of the *minimum* standards of acceptable conduct.

The CPC expressly provides pursuant to provision 2.4 that every IBCLC shall obey all applicable laws, including those regulating the activities of lactation consultants.

[Clinical Competencies for the Practice of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants \(IBCLCs\)](#) (dissemination and effective date December 12, 2018)

The Clinical Competencies encompass the responsibilities/activities that are part of the IBCLC's practice. The aim of these Clinical Competencies is to inform the public of the field in which IBCLCs can provide safe, competent, and evidence-based care. The Clinical Competencies are applicable in any country or setting where IBCLCs practice. It is understood that the IBCLC will practice within the boundaries of their training, expertise, culture, and setting.

Definition

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines [telehealth](#) as follows:

“Telehealth involves the use of telecommunications and virtual technology to deliver health care outside of traditional health-care facilities. Telehealth, which requires access only to telecommunications, is the most basic element of ‘eHealth,’ which uses a wider range of information and communication technologies (ICTs).”

IBLCE will make use of the WHO definition of telehealth for the purposes of this Advisory Opinion.

Advisory Opinion

Telehealth is not explicitly set forth in the IBLCE guiding documents referenced above. The Scope of Practice for IBCLCs specifies that IBLCE certificants have the duty to uphold the standards of the IBCLC profession by “working within the legal framework of the respective geopolitical regions or settings.”

Telehealth is an available option for IBCLCs provided it is permitted for practitioners in a particular country or jurisdiction of practice. Given the current presence of IBCLCs in 122

countries and territories, it is not practical to review the laws of all countries or jurisdictions where IBLCE certificants are located, and IBLCE cannot make a blanket statement as to the permissibility of telehealth because of the potential variation of the laws and regulations of different countries or jurisdictions.

However, if telehealth is permitted in an IBCLC's jurisdiction of practice, telehealth is a potentially viable option. In addition to the laws and regulations of one's specific jurisdiction, an IBCLC should particularly consider how his/her provision of lactation consulting services via telehealth is in alignment with the key provisions of each of these guiding practice documents inclusive of privacy, confidentiality, security, assessment, demonstration and evaluation of relevant techniques, provision of evidence-based information to clients, as well as appropriate collaboration with, or referral to, other healthcare providers. Special consideration should also be given to Principle 3.2 of the Code of Professional Conduct, which states that:

“Every IBCLC shall refrain from photographing, recording or taping (audio or video) a mother or her child for any purpose unless the mother has given advance written consent on her behalf or on behalf of her child.”