



June 16, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chair
Committee on Health, Education
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Telehealth Services

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

America's Physician Groups would like to thank you for your efforts to address the struggles that healthcare organizations have faced during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives resulting from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act legislation such as the Paycheck Protection Program, the expansion of telehealth programs, and the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) have greatly assisted physician practices and hospitals in providing treatment for those patients in need, flattening the pandemic curve, and relieving the financial pressures they have faced while serving their communities. But, as you know, the community public health need is still great. Of particular importance is the future of telemedicine. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these services have become vital in treating patients where they are as the nation embarks on widespread social distancing. Telehealth services allow physicians to extend care to more patients and increase access. We would like to express our enthusiastic support for telehealth services and Congress' support of expanding their availability.

About America's Physician Groups

APG is a national professional association representing over 300 physician groups that employ or contract with approximately 195,000 physicians that provide care to nearly 45 million patients. Our tagline, "Taking Responsibility for America's Health," represents our members' vision to move from the antiquated fee-for-service (FFS) reimbursement system to a value-based system where physician groups are accountable for the cost and quality of care. Our preferred model of capitated, delegated, and coordinated care eliminates incentives for waste associated with FFS reimbursement. APG member organizations are working diligently to rise to the challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are focused on the transition of most patient visits to telehealth as a best practice in slowing the spread of the virus and keeping patients safe.

As the healthcare landscape has changed in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, telehealth services have taken on a greater importance in how physicians treat patients. Providers have had to adapt to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic by transitioning up to 70 percent of care to telehealth. In addition, telehealth services hold particular importance for patients living in rural areas of the country for whom travel has always been difficult, even before the adoption of widespread social distancing. These areas usually do not have widespread access to broadband internet service making compliance with the video requirement for a face-to-face encounter an impossible lift for these patients that need these services the most. Giving both patients and providers the ability to communicate remotely has been invaluable in ensuring that care can continue to be offered to those who need it and access is not disrupted during these unprecedented times.

As physicians have rapidly adapted to the new paradigm of care during this public health emergency, the additional waivers and regulatory changes surrounding telehealth services offered by both Congress and various federal agencies have been vital in allowing them to extend much needed care and services to patients nationwide. In addition to treating COVID-19 patients, physicians have been able to affectively treat those suffering from chronic conditions, monitoring their health and creating effective care plans for treatment. The advantages that telehealth services represent for those patients with issues surrounding access to care, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly cannot be understated. We offer our continued support for telehealth services and their expansion and look forward to seeing the same from your committee and Congress in general.

Thank you for your attention to the above comments. We reiterate our robust support for telehealth services and their importance during this COVID-19 pandemic. We offer you our support and expertise moving forward on this issue and any others. Please feel free to contact Valinda Rutledge, Senior Vice President, Federal Affairs, (vrutledge@apg.org) if you have any questions or if America's Physician Groups can provide any assistance as you consider these issues.

Sincerely,



Donald H. Crane
President and CEO
America's Physician Groups