

June 15, 2021

Senator Bill Cassidy
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Tina Smith
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Ben Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator John Thune
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators Cassidy, Smith, Cardin, and Thune:

We write to thank you for your support of patients and providers in the mental health community by introducing the Telemental Health Care Access Act. We endorse your bill and applaud your efforts to ensure consistent coverage of mental health services furnished through telehealth.

Congress and the Administration have done much to utilize telehealth in response to COVID-19, and the results have been impressive. Prior to the pandemic just one percent of primary care visits were delivered via telehealth. Immediately after COVID-19 came ashore, primary care visits were delivered via telehealth more than 40 percent of the time. Telehealth improved access to care without generating cost increases for many, and at the exact time it was needed to help safeguard patients and prevent additional infections. It is a solid investment.

We were glad to see language pass through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 to remove Medicare restrictions on the mental health services delivered through virtual means, but we believe the inclusion of the in-person requirement every six months was unnecessary and a step in the wrong direction. Your legislation seeks to rectify that issue and we appreciate your leadership. Over the past ten years, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have removed in-person requirements as a prerequisite to treatment through telehealth. In-person requirements on telehealth services create unnecessary barriers to care and can be especially harmful for those seeking mental and behavioral health services. The Health Resources and Services Administration reports a shortage of over 6,500 providers in the mental and behavioral health specialty. The scarcity of providers, particularly in rural and underserved areas makes lifting the in-person requirement even more critical. Those seeking care should not, and in many instances cannot, travel for hours to see an in-person provider.

By removing the automatic application of an in-person requirement for telemental health services in Medicare, Congress can improve health and lower costs while increasing access and utilization. This is where health care must head to become consumer-focused and responsive in the 21st century. We strongly urge Congress to pass the Telemental Health Care Access Act and continue increasing patient access to convenient at-home telehealth services. Thank you for considering our comments and for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Health Innovation Alliance
American Telemedicine Association

STCHHealth
CoverMyMeds
HIMSS
PCHAlliance
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
athenahealth
Alliance for Connected Care
eHealth Initiative
Doctor On Demand
Hims & Hers
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
Partnership to Advance Virtual Care
Teladoc Health
Centerstone
American Psychiatric Association
3M Health Information Systems
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychological Association