

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 8, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you continue efforts to advance a year-end omnibus appropriations package, we urge you to provide for an extension of expanded coverage of Medicare telehealth services through the end of 2024. While there is overwhelming support for Congress to enact permanent telehealth legislation, the continued uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency has heightened the need for a near-term extension of the pandemic telehealth flexibilities to better protect patients' access to telehealth services and prevent disruptions in care.

Medicare beneficiaries have come to rely on expanded access to telehealth and are satisfied with their care.¹ Congress recognized telehealth's critical role in health care delivery through a 151-day extension of pandemic flexibilities after the end of the public health emergency in the *FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act*. While this was an important step, these unpredictable short-term extensions, tied to a public health emergency declaration of unknown duration, create disruption and impact patient access due to the lack of stability around the future of Medicare coverage for telehealth. The uncertainty that Congress has created and the significant costs required to ramp up high quality telehealth programs have caused many providers to delay fully integrating telehealth into their care delivery models to the detriment of patients' experience. The House of Representatives recognized the benefit of a longer-term extension when it overwhelmingly voted to extend Medicare telehealth flexibilities through 2024.

With a longer extension of expanded coverage of Medicare telehealth services, there is opportunity for additional evaluation. Recent reports indicate that pandemic telehealth flexibilities increased access to care for older adults from underserved communities² at limited

¹MedPAC. *Report to Congress: Medicare Payment Policy Chapter 14: Telehealth in Medicare after the coronavirus public health emergency*. March 2021.

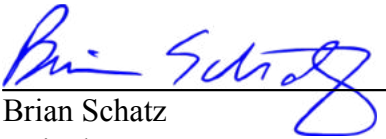
²Office of Inspector General, "Certain Medicare Beneficiaries, Such as Urban and Hispanic Beneficiaries, Were More Likely Than Others To Use Telehealth During the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Department of Health and Human Services, September 2022.

program integrity risk.³ We understand that HHS, MedPAC, providers, and academics around the country are currently analyzing the impacts of telehealth. An extension through 2024 will allow for additional data collection to inform evidence-based, permanent policies, including appropriate program integrity and beneficiary protections.

High quality, clinically appropriate telehealth services should be available to all Medicare beneficiaries, regardless of where they are located. Patients should also be able to access telehealth from their homes, which is where nearly all beneficiaries chose to utilize these services during the pandemic.⁴ There is a need to enact telehealth reforms included in the *CONNECT for Health Act*, which has bipartisan support from more than 200 members of Congress, as well as in other telehealth bills, on a permanent basis. At the same time, Congress must act now to prevent disruptions in patient care and protect access to services by extending telehealth coverage through 2024.

We appreciate your collaboration on this crucial issue and look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to ensure continued patient and provider access to telehealth services as you advance the omnibus appropriations package.

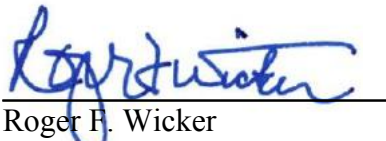
Sincerely,



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



David Schweikert
Member of Congress

³ Office of Inspector General, “Medicare Telehealth Services During the First Year of the Pandemic: Program Integrity Risks,” Department of Health and Human Services, September 2022.

⁴ Office of Inspector General, “Certain Medicare Beneficiaries, Such as Urban and Hispanic Beneficiaries, Were More Likely Than Others To Use Telehealth During the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Department of Health and Human Services, September 2022.



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



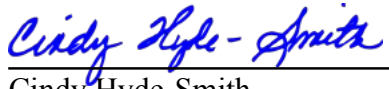
Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



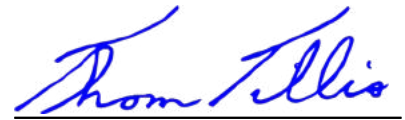
Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



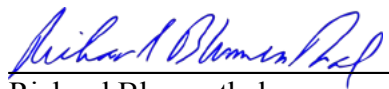
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



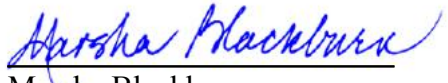
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



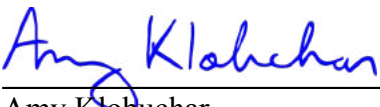
Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



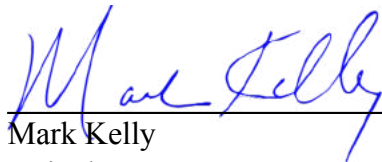
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



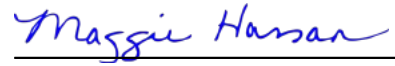
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



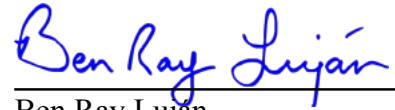
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



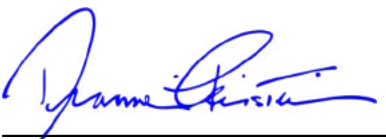
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



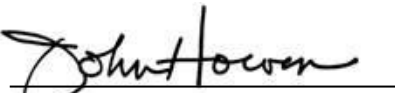
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator