

Health Information Compliance Alert

Is the Telehealth Expansion Here to Stay?

Legislators want to make updates permanent.

There's no denying that telehealth has been a boon to providers during the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE). Not only has the Medicare expansion helped to stem the spread of the virus, but it's also allowed clinicians to connect with patients and continue to offer services amidst shelter-in-place orders.

Plus, the relaxed federal restrictions and technical requirements have encouraged more providers - and patients - to jump on the telehealth bandwagon. The ready access has been a lifeline to many, and that's why bipartisan efforts are underway in both the **House of Representatives** and **Senate** to encourage the **Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) and the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) to make the changes permanent.

In addition to several bills on the table to extend the 1135 telehealth waiver benefits in both congressional chambers, the Senate heard testimony from industry insiders, including **American Telemedicine Association** (ATA) President **Joseph C. Kvedar, MD**, who urged legislators to push for telehealth reform.

"I have seen first-hand the many ways telehealth bridges the gap between a critical provider shortage and a growing patient population - a problem that existed prior to the pandemic, and one that will only worsen," said Kvedar before the Senate. "However, we need Congress's support to ensure patients and providers do not go over the telehealth 'cliff' as our nation eventually emerges from the pandemic. We must make sure that essential telehealth services do not abruptly end with the public health emergency, especially as we look to reorient our healthcare system to deliver 21st century care."



On June 29, the ATA and more than 340 other organizations sent a letter to Congressional leaders, on both sides of the aisle, advocating for telehealth flexibilities that could save providers both time and money.

Read the letter at

<http://connectwithcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Post-COVID-Telehealth-Priorities-Group-Letter-FIN.pdf>.

On July 2, these industry efforts were followed by a bipartisan letter signed by 35 senators, which explained the importance of the telehealth expansion during COVID-19 and outlined a path forward. The letter recommends CMS Administrator **Seema Verma** and HHS Secretary **Alex Azar** take action to update telehealth policies, offer guidance, and plan now for a post-pandemic world.

Find the Senate's letter at <https://www.cassidy.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/LTO.20.7.2.SmithCassidyTelehealthLetter-2.pdf>.