



Ensuring Medicare Patients Have Access to Telehealth During COVID-19 Emergency

On March 6, President Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2020 (H.R. 6074, Public Law 116-123), which provides \$8.3 billion in emergency funding, including a provision that allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to waive Medicare telehealth restrictions during the coronavirus outbreak so that patients can receive care no matter where they are located, including at home.

House sponsors of the [CONNECT for Health Act](#), another bill that would waive telehealth reimbursement restrictions during national emergencies, sent a letter last week to HHS Secretary Alex Azar urging the expeditious waiver implementation and guidance, as did Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee.

On March 17, HHS waived key restrictions and issued public guidance on that waiver. Notably, the guidance allows Medicare patients to receive telehealth services in their homes and permits psychologists to provide services to both existing and new Medicare patients allowing for greater service delivery than what was enacted into law. Providers can use telephones for patient services as long as they are equipped with audio and video capabilities that enable two-way, real-time interactive communication. The Office of Civil Rights at HHS announced it would waive penalties for potential HIPAA violations during this public health emergency.

APA will be releasing more details on these waivers as soon as possible. In addition, APA will continue to advocate for increasing patient access to telehealth services at the federal and state level so that psychologists can provide essential mental health care.

APA applauds the House and Senate sponsors of the APA-supported CONNECT for Health Act—Sens. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Ben Cardin (D-Md.), John Thune (R-S.D.), Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) and Reps. Mike Thompson (D-Calif.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), David Schweikert (R-Ariz.) and Bill Johnson (R-Ohio) for securing elements of their telehealth bill in the coronavirus response package.

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