



June 26, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Preparing for the Next Pandemic

Dear Chairman Alexander:

The Alliance for Connected Care appreciates the opportunity to offer feedback on your white paper outlining recommendations and important questions to better prepare for future pandemics. We applaud your ongoing leadership in responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency and appreciate you holding a hearing to examine telehealth, focusing on important lessons learned.

The Alliance is a leading voice on telehealth, and regularly briefs policymakers, thought leaders, and patient advocates about the usage and quality of telehealth across the United States. The goal of the Alliance for Connected Care is to create a legal and regulatory environment in which every provider in America is permitted to deliver safe, high quality care using telehealth technology at their discretion regardless of care delivery location or technological delivery method. Members of the Alliance for Connected Care have seen firsthand how expanded access to telehealth and remote patient monitoring can better coordinate care, create economic efficiencies, and drive better health outcomes.

As you know, telehealth is an important tool for bringing healthcare to those who need it most and has been a critical lifeline during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Telehealth is currently in use to improve access to care, speed diagnosis and treatment, and limit the risk of person-to-person transmission of the virus. Importantly, telehealth also eases the burden on day-to-day care delivery, allowing hospitals and physician practices to focus limited resources on critical, high-acuity patients, while providing efficient, quality care to non-COVID-19 patients.

Public Health Capabilities – Improve State and Local Capacity to Respond

In order to ensure that Americans can get back to their routine health care safely, enable doctors and hospitals to continue to provide health care services during a pandemic or other public emergency, and ensure that the United States does not lose the important technological gains and innovations made in telehealth over the past months we urge you to:



Make permanent HHS temporary telehealth waiver authority during emergencies. Congress has given HHS authority under Section 1135 of the Social Security Act to waive restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the waiver authority is specific to the public health emergency (PHE) declared by the Secretary on January 31, 2020, entitled ‘Determination that a Public Health Emergency Exists Nationwide as the Result of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus.’ Congress has drafted bipartisan, bicameral legislation language to address this concern – Section 9 of the *CONNECT for Health Act of 2019* (S. 2741).

Facilitate telehealth care across state borders. As you highlighted in the white paper, many states moved quickly to allow health care providers in good standing practice across state lines. In fact, nearly every state and territory has waived licensure requirements for telehealth during COVID-19. State lines create artificial barriers to the delivery of care – complicating access for patients and creating additional burden on clinicians. The Alliance appreciates CMS’ temporary waiver allowing practitioners to provide telehealth services across state lines without the requirement they be licensed in the state in which they are providing services. These waivers strengthened the healthcare workforce and maximized existing resources, enabling the healthcare system to be more resilient to both regional and widespread disasters.

Moving forward, America should seek to find a long-term solution to ease the practice of telehealth across state lines – while respecting the patient protection authority of states and clinical occupational boards. The ability for licensed, credentialed clinical providers to provide patient care throughout the country with ease would benefit patients and providers.

Expand broadband access to ensure access to care. Access to broadband has always been important but is now absolutely critical as most Americans turn to telehealth services to meet their healthcare needs. We strongly support the expansion of broadband subsidy programs as providers in areas all over the country are experiencing broadband network challenges due to COVID-19 traffic. Our members have seen 100-fold increases in the use of telemedicine by their patients –straining networks in many new ways. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted disparities that exist in access to care and the digital divide. Seniors, veterans and those living in rural areas may lack adequate access to broadband connectivity that can limit their options to care. We also strongly support efforts to ensure deployment of these broadband services can happen rapidly, as the need for this service is already peaking.

Thank you for your leadership. We look forward to working with you on this important effort. Please contact Chris Adamec at 202-640-5941 or cadamec@connectwithcare.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

Krista Drobac
Executive Director