

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 25, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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

Like many facets of everyday life, the nation's health care system transformed overnight with the onset of the pandemic. Telehealth and virtual care have been critical tools in preserving access to care, while decreasing risk for patients and providers alike during our ongoing response to COVID-19. As you consider proposals to improve the quality of our nation's infrastructure, we urge you to prioritize broadband and technology investments in health care. Specifically, we ask that you work to improve digital health equity by facilitating access to technologies that are used to deliver high-quality virtual care.

Patients' and providers' embrace of telehealth over the past year signals that virtual care is here to stay – even after the public health emergency ends. The benefits are clear: from urban to rural communities, telehealth advances access across America by meeting the patient where they are located. However, inequities do still exist in virtual care delivery. The ability to utilize services like telemedicine, remote monitoring, and other digital health solutions hinges not only on the patient's and the provider's access to broadband internet, but also on a provider's ability to invest in the devices and equipment necessary to offer these services. The uncertainty around sustained and adequate reimbursement for telehealth services has historically left many providers hesitant to make expensive, long-term investments in digital health solutions<sup>1</sup>. However, given the exponential rise in telehealth use and adoption<sup>2</sup> during the pandemic, and the remarkable embrace of these technologies by patients and providers, it is critically important that we continue to support providers' ability to leverage digital health solutions to care for their patients.

Digital health solutions come in many forms. They include live-interactive videoconferencing, remote monitoring, store-and-forward imaging, and provider education. In rural areas, telehealth can help deliver better care by connecting rural providers and their patients to services at distant

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<sup>1</sup> <https://c19hcc.org/static/catalog-resources/telehealth-physician-survey-analysis-c19hcc.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/263866/hp-issue-brief-medicare-telehealth.pdf>

sites. Lack of transportation continues to challenge timely care delivery in rural America, and telehealth plays an important role in ensuring patients can access the care they need, when they need it. Rural, urban and medically underserved areas all face provider shortages, especially for high-demand services like mental health, and families across America lack the child care or work flexibility needed to see their doctor in-person. For these patients, being able to receive care where they are located, including at home and within their communities, is helping to alleviate historical social and economic barriers that have limited equal access to quality, timely, affordable care.

Many different types of care settings can benefit from telehealth technology. For example, a rural primary care provider may need to refer a patient to a stroke specialist, but the primary care provider and patient reside in an area where no such specialists practice. With telehealth, the provider would be able to connect the patient with a specialist at a remote site, saving the patient travel time to another community to obtain care. Or a single mother that lacks reliable transportation can now ensure her child receives his virtual follow-up care after receiving a cochlear implant without her missing work and possibly a day of pay.

In response to the care delivery challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act made a down payment on modernizing our digital health infrastructure, providing \$200 million for the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to support health care providers in offering connected care services to patients at their homes or mobile locations. By reimbursing providers for the telecommunications systems and hardware necessary to provide digital health services, the FCC COVID-19 Telehealth Program has proven to be a critical catalyst to quickly expanding the use of connected care. The first round of the program received more than 5,000 applications from providers across the country and only 539 requests were funded. Congress doubled-down on the initial investment in the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) of 2021, and provided the Commission an additional \$249 million in funding for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program. Yet even as we are seeing a return on that investment, the need still exceeds the resources available in the current program.

Support from the FCC program has enhanced access and delivery across the care continuum. Endocrinologists, for example, are able to offer connected glucometers to their high-risk patients with diabetes to allow for continuous monitoring of their blood sugar. Other providers have used funds to invest in remote monitoring for expectant mothers with gestational diabetes. By tracking their vitals from home, the technology aims to reduce the number of visits to their OB-GYN during the pandemic. The funds have also been used to provide comprehensive telemental health services to older adults, particularly those who have struggled with isolation during the pandemic and are at a high risk for COVID-19 due to age and pre-existing conditions. Telehealth visits provide patients with high-quality care in lower cost settings, and in many cases, facilitate access to timely care that can later limit unnecessary trips to the emergency room. These are just a few of the countless ways that highlight telehealth's benefit to patients and illustrates the need for sustained investments in our digital infrastructure.

Telehealth is the future of health care. It bridges the gaps in care delivery, expands access to primary and specialty services, and mitigates social and economic inequalities by meeting patients where they are located. We must ensure that all Americans, regardless of where they seek services have access to high-quality, secure, and affordable digital health care. As you work to organize policies aimed at improving America's infrastructure, we urge you to prioritize further investment in broadband and digital care technologies, with a focus on directing

resources to rural and medically underserved areas. We ask that special consideration is also made for tribal health care providers and other practices that serve high-need communities.

We look forward to working with you to bridge health care's digital divide and truly embrace the potential of virtual care that empowers Americans to live healthier, happier lives.

Sincerely,



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Abigail D. Spanberger  
Member of Congress



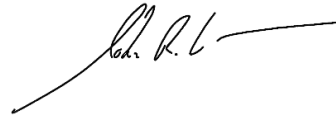
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Dusty Johnson  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



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John Curtis  
Member of Congress

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Cindy Axne  
Member of Congress

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Josh Gottheimer  
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