

# Tell Congress to make expanded access to covered telehealth services permanent

The success of telehealth adoption during the COVID-19 public health emergency makes it clear that Medicare telehealth benefits should remain available to patients after the pandemic is over.

However, unless Congress acts, most Medicare beneficiaries will abruptly lose access to these services when the public health emergency ends. That is because under section 1834(m) of the Social Security Act, Medicare patients must live in an eligible rural location, and travel to an eligible “originating site”—a qualified health care facility—in order to access telehealth services covered by the Medicare program. Congress authorized the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to waive these restrictions, but they will kick back in when the public health emergency (PHE) expires.

Physician practices have built successful telehealth systems that are making health care more accessible and convenient for patients—we should not turn back now. The American Medical Association (AMA) supports legislation that would permanently fix the originating site and geographic restriction on telehealth coverage for Medicare patients, thereby ensuring patients can continue to access Medicare telehealth services regardless of where they are located, including:

- H.R. 1332/S. 368, the **Telehealth Modernization Act of 2021**, which would lift the rural-only restriction and add any site where a patient is located as a potential originating site
- H.R. 2903/S. 1512, the **CONNECT for Health Act**, which would lift the rural-only restriction, add the home as an originating site, establish a process for the Secretary of the HSS to add originating sites, and provide HHS with the permanent authority to waive section 1834(m) restrictions.

The AMA also supports H.R. 4058/S. 2061, the **Telemental Health Care Access Act**. This important, bipartisan bill would repeal a new requirement that a patient must see a provider in person within six months of receiving a mental health telehealth service. This medically unnecessary requirement was included in the December 2020 OMNIBUS legislation without vetting from expert stakeholders. It should be repealed before it takes effect when the PHE expires.

**Action request: Urge your members of Congress to cosponsor H.R. 1332/S. 368, the Telehealth Modernization Act of 2021, H.R. 2903/S. 1512, the CONNECT for Health Act, and H.R. 4058/S. 2061, the Telemental Health Care Access Act.**