



June 16, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
 Chairman, Health, Education, Labor and
 Pensions Committee
 United States Senate
 Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
 Ranking Member, Health, Education, Labor
 and Pensions Committee
 United States Senate
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for leadership in response to the needs of communities and patients during the pandemic and for holding today's hearing entitled *Telehealth: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic*.

We are writing as members of the American Connection Project Broadband Coalition, a collection of 25 major companies and trade associations being led by Land O'Lakes Inc. The coalition, representing agriculture, financial services, healthcare and technology, is advocating for robust funding for federal investment in broadband internet connectivity to advance telehealth, distance learning and the tremendous economic value that comes with internet connectivity. As the pandemic shined a light on the essential nature of connectivity, we were grateful for the responsiveness of governors who called for policies to increase telehealth access and broadband internet service, and the members of Congress who took unprecedented action to respond to COVID-19. Given the increased access to health care that telehealth has provided during this public health emergency, it is clear that expanded telehealth policies must be a permanent tenet of our health care system.

Our coalition's healthcare partners have witnessed the positive impact of telehealth in improving access to care and improving patient experience. For example:

- HealthPartners saw a 10 percent increase in completed visits in mental health over a two-month period of the pandemic compared to visits in 2019 and had their patient no show rate decrease by nearly 50 percent.
- Mayo Clinic conducted more telehealth visits per day during the pandemic than all of the visits combined in 2019. To highlight the utilization of one type of telehealth modality, during April 2020, Mayo Clinic completed over 45,000 video appointments direct to patients. During this time, Mayo Clinic provided care to nearly 8000 patients each day using a variety of digital healthcare tools. Importantly, recent patient surveys indicate that patients are as equally satisfied with video visits as with in-person visits overall.
- Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare has conducted virtual care visits with nearly 3,700 children since the end of March helping ensuring continuity of care for children with disabilities and complex conditions.
- Cleveland Clinic implemented telephone and app-based monitoring of nearly 13,000 elderly, frail patients with chronic conditions, escalating to a virtual visit to address urgent issues. This resulted in a 35 percent reduction in admissions compared to a risk-adjusted control group.
- CentraCare, serving predominately rural areas and small towns, has seen significant utilization of telehealth services from patients in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and even 90s, with no reduction at all in patient satisfaction.

We must continue momentum to improve public health, now more than ever before. We urge Congress to undertake legislative action to make permanent those emergency flexibilities that have allowed providers and patients to determine where the best care takes place. For many patients, including those in both rural and urban areas, this means receiving high quality care at home or as close to home as possible, through virtual visits. Additionally, we support regulatory efforts by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to make permanent the broad array of providers and service lines newly available to Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries during the pandemic.

We appreciate your consideration of permanently implementing the policy changes that have accelerated virtual healthcare access during COVID-19. We also know that improving Americans' access to broadband can further increase telehealth access and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities long into the future. There is no investment that will deliver more impactful or immediate returns.

Sincerely,

Beth Ford
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Andrea Walsh
President and CEO
Health Partners

Kenneth Holman
President and CEO
CentraCare

Barbara Joers
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Deanna Larson
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Mike Parrish
Vice President of Government Relations
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Hunter Carpenter
Director of Public Policy
Agricultural Retailers Association

Cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions