



Expanding Access to Care

Streamlining Health Care Delivery through Technology

Background

Health centers are increasingly using telehealth to better meet their patients' needs and to overcome persistent clinical workforce shortages. Telehealth encompasses a variety of technologies used to deliver virtual medical, health, and education services.

Telehealth services help address geographic, economic, transportation, and linguistic barriers to health care access. Because community health centers are required to offer comprehensive services in areas of high need, including sparsely populated rural areas, **health centers are pioneering the use of telehealth to expand access to quality health care services.**

The Facts

- Telehealth has proven to result in **better outcomes for patients**, making it a crucial tool to deliver comprehensive primary and preventive health care for all populations.
- In 2016, **57 percent of health centers across the nation** had either begun using telehealth, were in the process of implementing a telehealth program, or were actively exploring its feasibility.
- **Health centers serve 1 in 6 Americans living in rural communities.** Telehealth programs are especially critical in rural areas, where many residents can face long distances between home and health provider, particularly specialized providers. **In rural communities, nearly half (46%) of health centers utilized telehealth for services outside the clinic.**

The Challenge

Currently, only health centers located in a rural Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or outside of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are eligible for Medicare reimbursement as an originating site, where the patient is located. **Health centers are not currently eligible for reimbursement under Medicare as a distant site**, where the provider is located.

While many health centers have utilized grants and other one-time funding opportunities to integrate telehealth technologies into their practice, **reimbursement for telehealth is critical to the long-term sustainability and expansion** of telehealth services.

Our Request:

To support health center utilization of telehealth services, Members of Congress should:

- **Co-sponsor the CONNECT For Health Act of 2017 (S. 1016, Schatz/Wicker and H.R. 2556, Black/Welch)** allowing Medicare to recognize health centers as "distant and originating sites" and to cover remote patient monitoring.