



July 29, 2020

The Honorable Devin Nunes  
1013 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Nunes:

On behalf of National Taxpayers Union (NTU), the nation's oldest taxpayer advocacy organization, I write to thank you and your colleagues for your work on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee's telehealth discussion draft. Many of the provisions outlined by your team would ensure that widespread access to affordable telehealth services becomes a permanent feature of the Medicare program.

According to Seema Verma, the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Medicare saw a nearly 130-fold increase in beneficiaries using telehealth services from before the public health emergency to the end of April.<sup>1</sup> Nearly six million Medicare patients have used telehealth technology to access office visits, and nearly another half million have used telehealth to access mental health services.<sup>2</sup>

More importantly, the millions of Medicare beneficiaries accessing telehealth services report widespread satisfaction with these new opportunities. According to polling conducted by the Better Medicare Alliance and *Morning Consult*, 91 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who used telehealth services recently had a favorable experience.<sup>3</sup> Nearly four in five reported they "are likely to complete a medical appointment via telehealth again in the future."<sup>4</sup>

The significant use of and satisfaction with telehealth services in Medicare indicates that the recent legislative and regulatory changes should be permanent features of the program. Widespread adoption of telehealth could help patients, providers, and the Medicare program at large achieve cost savings and efficiencies that were a remote possibility just six months ago. Patients could have quicker and safer access to services like office visits, providers could have more time with individual patients or time to see more patients per day, and taxpayers

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<sup>1</sup> Verma, Seema. "Early Impact Of CMS Expansion Of Medicare Telehealth During COVID-19." *Health Affairs*, July 15, 2020. Retrieved from:

<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200715.454789/full/#:~:text=Expanding%20Telemedicine%20For%20Medicare%20Beneficiaries%20During%20The%20COVID%2D19%20Outbreak&text=CMS%20also%20added%20135%20allowable.beneficiaries%20could%20receive%20via%20telehealth>. (Accessed July 22, 2020.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Better Medicare Alliance. (May 27, 2020). "POLL: Seniors Give Telehealth High Marks; Medicare Advantage Satisfaction Smashes New Record." Retrieved from:

<https://www.bettermedicarealliance.org/news/poll-seniors-give-telehealth-high-marks-medicare-advantage-satisfaction-smashes-new-record/> (Accessed July 22, 2020.)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

could realize savings as seniors avoid unnecessary tests, procedures, or hospitalizations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping seniors out of the hospital carries even more importance than it does in normal times.

Your discussion draft represents a major step forward in making easy telehealth access a permanent feature of the Medicare program. Among several strong provisions in the draft, we applaud:

- The discussion draft's permanent removal of geographic and originating site restrictions;
- The discussion draft's expansion of the list of practitioners eligible to furnish telehealth services, to physical therapists, occupational therapists, and qualified speech-language pathologists;
- The discussion draft's permanent allowal of audio-only telehealth services; and
- The discussion draft's permanent allowal of a safe harbor for Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) that provide telehealth services before a patient meets a plan's deductible.

In addition to the above provisions in the discussion draft, we encourage the Committee to continue to study the advent of telehealth uptake in Medicare, and explore how these trends could benefit patients and taxpayers for decades to come. Thank you for your work on these provisions, and we look forward to working with you more as you consider legislation expanding telehealth use in the Medicare program.

Sincerely,

Andrew Lautz

Policy and Government Affairs Manager

CC: The Honorable Kevin Brady, Ranking Member, House Committee on Ways and Means  
The Honorable Jason Smith  
The Honorable Adrian Smith  
The Honorable Tom Reed  
The Honorable Mike Kelly  
The Honorable Tom Rice  
The Honorable David Schweikert  
The Honorable Jackie Walorski  
The Honorable Darin LaHood  
The Honorable Brad Wenstrup  
The Honorable Jodey Arrington  
The Honorable Drew Ferguson  
The Honorable Ron Estes