

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo

Hearing on “The Future of Telehealth: How COVID-19 is Changing the Delivery of Virtual Care”

March 2, 2021

As the Chairwoman of the Health Subcommittee and a senior member of the Communications and Technology Subcommittee, I’ve been highlighting the importance of telehealth for years.

And I’m not the only one. This has been a longstanding, bipartisan issue for many Members on this Subcommittee, including Representatives Peter Welch, Doris Matsui, and Bill Johnson, who are all leads on the *CONNECT for Health Act*, and Robin Kelly who leads the *Evaluating Disparities and Outcomes of Telehealth Act*.

It’s time to make Medicare reimbursement for telehealth service permanent.

Over the last several months, I’ve talked to health care professionals and providers in my district, including Dr. Mahoney of Stanford Health, who I’m so pleased to have on our expert panel today. I’ve heard how the wide adoption of telehealth has been a bright spot during a very dark time.

One reason is that HHS waived many outdated rules and payment policies surrounding telehealth coverage in traditional Medicare during the public health emergency.

A nonpartisan HHS report found that from mid-March through early July 2020, more than 10.1 million traditional Medicare beneficiaries used telehealth thanks to those waivers.

It’s also the first time we’ve had substantive data on the quality and use of telehealth at scale.

We’re quickly learning how telehealth can be used to address specialty shortages. For example, 70% of U.S. counties have no child psychiatrist. Telehealth could help close that gap.

Telehealth can also address racial disparities in health outcomes. Our Subcommittee has studied racial bias in doctors and how it impacts maternal mortality. A new landmark study by the University of Minnesota School of Public Health recently showed that the mortality rate for Black babies is cut in half when Black doctors care for them. Telehealth could make it easier for patients of color to find a doctor of their same race or who speaks the same language.

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I know telehealth isn't the silver bullet for the deeper problems that exist in our health care system, but it does show promise for high-quality, innovative care if we intentionally create legislation that fits our nation's needs.

Now that Medicare beneficiaries and Americans are receiving this important benefit, we need to find a way to continue affordable telehealth access for seniors and other Americans.

From today's hearing we will learn from providers, payers, and patients about their experiences with telehealth and be better able to chart a legislative path forward to deliver on the promise of telehealth.