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House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Health
“The Future of Telehealth: How COVID-19 is Changing the Delivery of
Virtual Care”
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As Prepared for Delivery

EASTERN WASHINGTON

Thank you Chair...and thank you to our witnesses for participating today.

Telehealth is a vital way for patients to access care, especially in rural communities and during the pandemic.

I grew up in a small town in Kettle Falls...

... and I have lived through the challenges that people face in rural communities when it comes to accessing health care.

I have also visited hospitals and health care facilities all throughout my district in Eastern Washington too.

As a leader on the Rural Healthcare Caucus, our conversations about expanding telehealth to address doctor shortages is no longer just a goal for the future, it's happening today.

In response to COVID-19, Providence Health System--- which has four hospitals in my district,--scaled up their telehealth services from more than 7 thousand visits in 2019 to more than **100 thousand** visits in 2020.

This is more than a **1,000% increase** in volume.

Physicians across Washington state have leveraged telehealth technologies to reach more patients, save lives, and improve care.

They diagnosed appendicitis in a young patient...

...worked with a pregnant woman to help find her baby's fetal heart beat...

....and providing care for behavioral health patients.

REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP

Across America, COVID-19 led to a massive expansion of telehealth, when non-emergency visits were shuttered.

It was the only way for people to get routine care.

The Trump administration took bold and rapid action by...

... waiving certain requirements so technology like Facetime could be used for telehealth ...

... requiring Medicare to pay for more services by telehealth, and reducing out of pocket costs for telehealth...

... removing any federal licensing requirements and...

... expanding the availability of telehealth services in long-term care settings, where people are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

According to the CDC, the number of telehealth visits increased by 154 percent during the first quarter of 2020.

HHS reported that **nearly half** of all Medicare primary care visits were via telehealth in April, compared with less than 1% in February before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WIN THE FUTURE OF TELEHEALTH

Now, it's time to plan for the future of telehealth.

Thanks to the groundwork we laid with 21st Century Cures, leadership by the private sector, and Operation Warp Speed, the third vaccine for COVID-19 was just authorized for emergency use.

Also, this past weekend, more than 2 million shots made it into people's arms each day.

With continued work, I'm hopeful we will crush this virus and restore our way of life—that includes patients returning to the doctor's office without fear of contracting COVID-19.

However, the pandemic has made clear that telehealth can and should be a part of modernizing health care delivery in America.

It's up to Congress to make sure we understand how this dramatic expansion has helped patients get the care they need.

That means examining both where telehealth may not be appropriate **and** when it drives better outcomes for patients.

Our shared goal should be to promote solutions that help patients recover from their illnesses and manage their chronic conditions better--- whether it is through a video call **OR** in-person care.

With the rise of anxiety and suicides,, I'm especially interested in the advantages of telehealth to reach people who are need of mental health care.

We have also seen a real risk of waste, fraud, and abuse in telehealth. We need to take that into account.

We also need to be aware of the cost to the health care system of changes we want to make permanent.

The Medicare Hospital Trust Fund is projected to go bankrupt in 2024 – less than five years from now.

We need to make sure we expand telehealth **and** maintain our commitment to the nation's seniors to provide a top-notch level of care.

CONCLUSION

I'm optimistic about telehealth and its ability to improve the health and wellness of Americans.

It's bringing doctors right into families' living rooms...

... and it's an example of how innovation can improve and save people's lives.

This hearing today is just the beginning of a discussion we need to have about the future of health care.

Let's work together in a bipartisan way to review the experiences of the last year and where we can further unleash life-saving innovation and medical breakthroughs.

Let's have a plan for America to lead the way on the best use of telehealth for the benefit of every patient.

Thank you and I yield back.