

**Opening Remarks
Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Health Subcommittee Hearing:
Legislative Proposals to Support Patient Access to
Telehealth Services
April 10, 2024**

INTRO

Over the last several years, telehealth has proven itself to be a vital way for patients to access care, particularly in rural communities.

One of the lessons we've learned from the pandemic is that telehealth should continue to be part of modernizing the health care ecosystem across the country.

That's why we are here today, working across the aisle to ensure this option for care remains available across the country moving forward.

EASTERN WASHINGTON

I grew up in the small town of Kettle Falls, Washington...

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

I frequently visit hospitals and health care facilities all throughout my district in Eastern Washington – many in rural areas.

These issues matter, which is why I'm proud to say that our conversations about expanding telehealth to address barriers to care—like transportation or doctor shortages—are no longer just aspirational goals, 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 7,000 visits in 2019 to more than **100,000** visits in 2020.

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

And they didn't stop there. Providence Health System and physicians across Washington state have continued to innovate with telehealth technologies to reach more patients, save lives, and improve care.

Using telehealth, Providence physicians have been able to diagnose appendicitis in a young patient...

...work with a pregnant woman to help find her baby's fetal heartbeat...

....and provide care for patients with mental health conditions.

I am glad Providence is here to today to talk about how their providers have continued to use technology to help patients.

WIN THE FUTURE OF TELEHEALTH:

At the end of the last Congress, we worked together to make a bipartisan investment to continue the telehealth flexibilities patients benefited from during the pandemic.

But those flexibilities are now set to expire at the end of this year.

We want to make sure patients remain in control of their doctor visit decisions, and it is the patient deciding whether or not to utilize telehealth services.

Today, we'll discuss legislation to do just that, such as Representative Carter's *Telehealth Modernization Act*.

While we recognize continuing telehealth flexibilities for patients will require significant investment...

...we can't afford to go backwards and lose the progress we've made in expanding access to care.

Additionally, we will also hear new ideas on where we should go from here beyond the telehealth policies established coming out of the pandemic.

These bills, such as the *Telehealth Enhancement for Mental Health Act*, led by our Committee's newest Member, Representative James, offer us opportunities to further improve how we're using telehealth to help patients.

CONCLUSION:

I'll close by noting that I'm optimistic about telehealth and its ability to improve the health and wellness of Americans, especially those in rural communities around the country.

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

...making it easier for patients to get the health care they need

... and it is a great example of how innovation can improve and save people's lives.

We must maintain our commitment to our nation's seniors to provide a top-notch level of care in a way that does not increase their Medicare costs and makes sure Medicare is sustainable for the future.

This hearing today is a first step towards that process for telehealth and another important part of this committee's mission to make the health care system work better for patients.

America can and should lead the way on the best use of telehealth for the benefit of every patient.

Thank you and I yield back.