

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7879

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to expand and improve the provision of telehealth services to veterans.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 30, 2020

Mrs. LEE of Nevada (for herself, Mr. BANKS, Mr. STEIL, and Ms. TORRES SMALL of New Mexico) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to expand and improve the provision of telehealth services to veterans.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “VA Telehealth Expan-
5 sion Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. GRANT PROGRAM TO EXPAND TELEHEALTH FROM**
7 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
9 shall enter into partnerships, and expand existing partner-

1 ships, with entities that represent or serve veterans, non-
2 profit organizations, private businesses, and other inter-
3 ested parties for the expansion of telehealth capabilities
4 and the provision of telehealth services to veterans
5 through the award of grants under subsection (c). Such
6 telehealth services shall be provided by health care pro-
7 viders of the Department of Veterans Affairs or through
8 the Veterans Community Care Program under section
9 1703 of title 38, United States Code.

10 (b) PREFERENCE.—When selecting entities with
11 which to enter into or to expand a partnership under sub-
12 section (a), the Secretary shall give preference to entities
13 that—

14 (1) represent veterans in rural or highly rural
15 areas (as determined through the use of the Rural-
16 Urban Commuting Areas coding system of the De-
17 partment of Agriculture); or

18 (2) operate in a medically underserved commu-
19 nity (as defined in section 799B of the Public
20 Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 295p)).

21 (c) AWARD OF GRANTS.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out partnerships
23 entered into or expanded under this section with en-
24 tities described in subsection (a), the Secretary shall
25 award grants to those entities.

1 (2) MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF GRANTS.—The
2 amount of a grant awarded under this subsection
3 may not exceed \$75,000 in one year.

4 (3) USE OF GRANTS.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—Grants awarded to an
6 entity under this subsection may be used for
7 one or more of the following:

8 (i) Purchasing or upgrading hardware
9 or software necessary for the provision of
10 secure and private telehealth services.

11 (ii) Upgrading security protocols for
12 consistency with the security requirements
13 of the Department.

14 (iii) Training of employees, including
15 payment of those employees for completing
16 that training, with respect to—

17 (I) military and veteran cultural
18 competence, if the entity is not an or-
19 ganization that represents veterans;

20 (II) appropriate processes for
21 handling emergencies that occur dur-
22 ing telehealth;

23 (III) equipment required to pro-
24 vide telehealth services; or

1 (IV) any other unique training
2 needs for the provision of telehealth
3 services to veterans.

4 (iv) Upgrading existing infrastructure
5 owned or leased by the entity to make
6 rooms more conducive to telehealth care,
7 including—

8 (I) additions or modifications to
9 windows or walls in an existing room,
10 or other alterations as needed to cre-
11 ate a new, private room;

12 (II) soundproofing of an existing
13 room;

14 (III) new electrical or internet
15 outlets in an existing room; or

16 (IV) aesthetic or other enhance-
17 ments to establish a more suitable
18 therapeutic environment.

19 (v) Upgrading existing infrastructure
20 to comply with the Americans with Disabil-
21 ities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et
22 seq.).

23 (vi) Upgrading infrastructure or inter-
24 net services.

1 (B) EXCLUSION.—Grants may not be used
2 for the purchase of new property or for major
3 construction projects, as determined by the Sec-
4 retary.

5 (d) AGREEMENT ON TELEHEALTH ACCESS
6 POINTS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—An entity described in sub-
8 section (a) that seeks to establish a telehealth access
9 point for veterans but does not require grant fund-
10 ing under this section to do so may enter into an
11 agreement with the Department for the establish-
12 ment of such an access point.

13 (2) INSPECTION TO DETERMINE ADEQUACY OF
14 FACILITIES.—The Secretary shall inspect any such
15 access point to determine whether the access point
16 is private, secure, and accessible to veterans.

17 (e) ASSESSMENT OF BARRIERS TO ACCESS.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months
19 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
20 retary shall complete an assessment of barriers faced
21 by veterans in accessing telehealth services.

22 (2) ELEMENTS.—The assessment required by
23 paragraph (1) shall include the following:

24 (A) An assessment of current and potential
25 future barriers, including—

- 1 (i) cost;
- 2 (ii) access to broadband internet in-
- 3 frastructure and technology;
- 4 (iii) digital competency; and
- 5 (iv) discrimination (including cultural,
- 6 language, or medical discrimination).

7 (B) A description of how the Secretary

8 plans to address the barriers described in sub-

9 paragraph (A).

10 (C) Such other matters related access by

11 veterans to telehealth while not on property of

12 the Department the Secretary determines rel-

13 evant.

14 (3) REPORT.—Not later than 120 days after

15 the completion of the assessment required by para-

16 graph (1), the Secretary shall submit to the Com-

17 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the

18 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of

19 Representatives a report on the assessment, includ-

20 ing any recommendations for legislative or adminis-

21 trative action based on the results of the assessment.

○