



**January 18, 2024**

The Honorable Mike Bost  
Chair  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano,

On behalf of ATA Action, the American Telemedicine Association's affiliated trade association focused on advocacy, I would like to thank the Committee for its continued work on considering the challenges our veterans face who live in rural communities by holding a hearing on "Rural Access: Is VA Meeting All Veterans Where They Live?" ATA Action advances policy to ensure all individuals have permanent access to telehealth services across the care continuum.

Telehealth is a pivotal component in the dynamic landscape of our healthcare system, serving as a catalyst for enhanced access to care, cost reduction, and the alleviation of challenges posed by provider shortages. This transformative approach effectively streamlines the healthcare system, making it more efficient and responsive to the diverse needs of patients.

Within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which caters to nearly 5 million rural patients spanning 50 states, telemedicine has emerged as a cornerstone for expanding healthcare access.<sup>1</sup> The VHA has been at the forefront of advocating for telehealth solutions, including video visits, telephone care, and secure messaging. To address the unique needs of veterans, the VA took significant strides in recent years, implementing a rule in 2018 that maximized license portability for VA healthcare professionals. This groundbreaking move empowered them to utilize telehealth services to connect with veteran patients anywhere, irrespective of their geographic location, thereby establishing a comprehensive "anywhere to anywhere" practice.

Despite substantial investments and initiatives by the VA to bolster care access, such as early telemedicine infrastructure and the legalization of interstate care, the disparities in rural telemedicine persist.<sup>2</sup> Even with efforts to bridge the digital divide through initiatives like tablet distribution, challenges remain. To address these issues, future telemedicine research and implementation endeavors should adopt a multi-level intervention approach, aiming to overcome any and all digital divide. A comprehensive, effective approach will be required to ensure individuals gain access to affordable broadband connections.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.research.va.gov/topics/rural\\_health.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/topics/rural_health.cfm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9993180/>



We hope Congress will take permanent action to ensure patients across the country have access to safe, affordable, and effective health care where and when they need it.

Thank you again for continued support of telehealth. Please reach out to [kzebley@ataaction.org](mailto:kzebley@ataaction.org) if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure the appropriate telehealth policies are implemented in a timely manner to allow enough time for providers to come into compliance and ensure certainty to care for patients across the nation. Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Zebley".

Kyle Zebley  
Executive Director  
ATA Action