



March 11, 2021

Dear Governors,

Together, the undersigned organizations represent more than 350,000 physicians across the nation. We want to thank you for your leadership during the past year, especially in regard to ensuring patients had increased access to and coverage of telemedicine. During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased availability and coverage of telemedicine has helped us treat established patients and reach many new patients in need of medical care. Our physician community urges you to support legislation and regulations that will permanently retain certain provisions allowing broad access and coverage of telemedicine so patients have the same access to telemedicine, including audio-only care, even after the pandemic has ended.

While some of our members had not widely practiced telemedicine prior to the pandemic, they were able to harness technological capabilities to quickly transition to the use of telemedicine, ensuring patients still received medical care in the face of a global pandemic. As physicians, we have been able to serve new patients in rural and underserved communities as well as in major cities. We have seen lower “no show” rates for our patients, which means patients are more consistently receiving treatment and medical care they need. Additionally, audio-only flexibilities for telemedicine have helped us treat those patients who do not have access to technology and patients with no broadband or internet access. Some of our members report that without an audio-only option, some patients – such as older African Americans<sup>1</sup> and those in tribal communities<sup>2</sup> – would have otherwise gone without medical care.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez JA, Betancourt JR, Sequist TD, Ganguli I. Differences in the use of telephone and video telemedicine visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Am J Manag Care*. 2021 Jan;27(1):21-26. doi: 10.37765/ajmc.2021.88573.

<sup>2</sup> See: Report on Broadband Deployment in Indian Country, Pursuant to the Repack Airwaves Yielding Better Access for Users of Modern Services Act of 2018, Federal Communications Commission, May 2019, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-357269A1.pdf>

Patients appreciate the time and money saved by utilizing telemedicine; they no longer have to structure their day around traveling to a doctor's office or arranging for childcare. When patients have access to timely, comprehensive care via telemedicine, they are more likely to consistently keep their appointments, resulting in a continuity of care. This allows physicians to address emergent medical conditions earlier and many times prevent them from escalating, possibly resulting in a trip to the emergency room.<sup>3</sup> Intervening early via telemedicine is cost effective for both patients and insurers in the long run.

The ability to see a patient via telemedicine should be driven by clinical decision making over any other factors. When the public health emergency ends, telemedicine should remain an option for providing care. Please support legislation and regulations that:

- Lift originating site restrictions to allow patients to be seen in their home.
- Require payers to cover telemedicine the same as in-person visits as it relates to payment and access, including audio-only communications.
- Require that payers treat telemedicine recommendations and treatment the same as in-person visits and not limit coverage based on the type of visit, including medication prescriptions, consistent with state and federal laws and regulations.
- Allow physicians and providers, not insurers, to select telemedicine platform that meets state and federal safety and security requirements.

We are thankful for your consideration and support of legislation and regulations to ensure that patients continue to have the option to receive comprehensive medical care via telemedicine both now and in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact any of our organizations for assistance in your state.

Sincerely,

American Psychiatric Association  
American Academy of Neurology  
American Urological Association  
Association for Clinical Oncology  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Osteopathic Association

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<sup>3</sup> Hilty DM, Ferrer DC, Parish MB, Johnston B, Callahan EJ, Yellowlees PM. The effectiveness of telemental health: a 2013 review. *Telemed J E Health.* 2013;19(6):444-454. doi:10.1089/tmj.2013.0075