


Rural Telehealth



Telehealth increases access to health care for rural patients by removing travel burdens and addressing provider shortages.

Telehealth visits for rural Medicare beneficiaries increased from 2004 to 2013 at an annual growth rate of 28%.

Rural hospitals are more likely to use telehealth to assist with providing radiology, emergency, and trauma healthcare services.

Nearly 80% of rural beneficiary telehealth visits were for behavioral health.

Challenges

Medicare flexibilities put in place during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency will expire on December 31, 2024 without congressional action.

Medicare reimbursement is commonly cited as a major challenge for telehealth programs, particularly for Rural Health Clinics which are paid outside of their All-Inclusive Rate for Medicare telehealth services.

The physician licensure system creates barriers for physicians to practice across state lines. Physicians must be licensed by the professional licensing board in each state where they are delivering care to patients.

The broadband gap between rural and urban areas leads to health inequities. Many rural communities do not currently have access to internet connection speeds that support the use of telehealth.

NRHA Supported Legislation

CONNECT for Health Act (S. 2016/H.R. 4189)

Senators Schatz (D-HI) & Wicker (R-MS), Reps. Thompson (D-CA), & Schweikert (R-AZ)

Expand coverage of telehealth services through Medicare and making permanent COVID-19 telehealth flexibilities.

Protecting Rural Telehealth Access Act (S. 1636/H.R. 3440)

Senators Manchin (D-WV), Ernst (R-IA), Moran (R-KS), Shaheen (D-NH), & Reps. Pappas (D-NH), McClain (R-MI), LaTurner (R-KS), Molinaro (R-NY), Mooney (R-WV), Nunn (R-IA)

Permanently allow audio-only telehealth appointments and add RHCs and FQHCs as distant site providers.

ReConnecting Rural America Act 2023 (S. 1642/H.R. 4227)

Senators Glenn (D-VT) & Marshall (R-KS), and Rep Nunn (R-PA)

Expand access to high-speed broadband in rural communities, where broadband access is severely limited.

HEALTH Act (H.R. 5611)

Rep. Thompson (R-PA)

Expand coverage to include audio-only telehealth services. Permanently allows FQHCs and RHCs to serve as the distant site provider for telehealth services.