

# ACT TO ENSURE PATIENTS' ACCESS TO TELEHEALTH

The COVID-19 public health emergency spurred regulators to ease rules on telehealth so seniors, children, and families—especially those in rural and underserved communities—face fewer barriers to medical care access. Federal and state telehealth waivers instituted due to the pandemic demonstrated how quickly policymakers, payers, and providers can work together on behalf of patients and families.

## MARYLAND CAN'T GO BACKWARD

- **Marylanders, especially vulnerable and underserved populations, rely on telehealth to continue to safely receive care despite the pandemic.** According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, delivery of telehealth services for Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries rose 2,600% between March and June 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019. Maryland had the highest rate in the nation of telehealth use by seniors on Medicaid during that same period.
- **Audio-only consultations are the only direct link for patients having technology and broadband challenges.** About 80% of seniors have cell phones, but only 42% have smartphones. In Maryland, this digital divide is compounded by limited access to affordable broadband internet, with about 324,000 rural Marylanders lacking access. Even in urban areas such as Baltimore City, more than 40% of households lack high-speed internet.
- **Remote patient monitoring (RPM) allows a clinician to continually monitor the patient's condition and adjust care based on real-time information collected from the patient.** Recognizing the value of these services, CMS recently lowered administrative barriers to RPM usage.
- As clinicians continue to deliver care to patients with ongoing conditions, they **must be permitted to deliver care where patients need it, including their homes and other locations.** Patients should not have to prove a hardship or access barrier to receive telehealth services.

## HOW THE PRESERVE TELEHEALTH ACCESS ACT OF 2021 HELPS

SOLUTION	RATIONALE
Allow appropriate health care services delivered via audio-only	Audio-only may be the sole option for care when in-person is inaccessible and patients lack advanced technology
Remove originating and distant site restrictions	Ensures patients can receive care where they are, based on consumer choice and safety, while ensuring providers can deliver services at an appropriate location, which may not always be at a hospital
Allow the same reimbursement for clinically necessary services whether delivered via telehealth or in person	Providers must be fairly compensated for their time and the infrastructure necessary to build telehealth care programs
Expand remote patient monitoring to align with state health initiatives that support Maryland's Total Cost of Care Model	Data-driven platforms enable providers to identify health issues and intervene before they escalate and require emergency care

## HOW CAN YOU HELP

The real work begins now as COVID-19 emergency provisions help providers to fully leverage telehealth to close gaps in accessing care. To back away could leave thousands of Marylanders without care. We need long-term solutions to permanently remove barriers to deliver safe, reliable care via telehealth to all Marylanders. By preserving telehealth flexibility you will support the investments made to build infrastructure to meet patients where they are.

**PASS THE PRESERVE TELEHEALTH ACCESS ACT OF 2021**