



April 9, 2024

The Honorable Annie Kuster
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kuster and Thompson,

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to share our support for the Helping Ensure Access to Local TeleHealth (HEALTH) Act, H.R. 5611. We appreciate your leadership in introducing this legislation that would ensure patients in underserved and rural communities will continue to receive telehealth services from their local community health centers and rural health clinics.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians, related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

The College supports the expanded role of telehealth as a method of health care delivery that may enhance the patient-physician relationship, improve health outcomes, increase access to care from physicians and members of a patient's health care team, and reduce medical costs. Telehealth can serve as an alternative for patients who lack access to in-person primary or specialty care due to various social drivers of health such as lack of transportation or paid sick leave, or insufficient work schedule flexibility to seek in-person care during the day, among many others. Telehealth flexibilities from the pandemic-era public health emergency (PHE) have been instrumental in improving access to care for patients. We have been and continue to be supportive of flexibility to ensure that Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) can continue to provide telehealth services and be reimbursed for those services. Further, ACP supports policy to expand originating sites and lift geographic requirements so that patients can receive virtual care at home based on their needs and clinical appropriateness. ACP strongly supports audio-only telehealth as it can be a critical tool for patients who may not have reliable broadband access for virtual video visits with their physicians. Improving access to audio-only telehealth services is a major factor in improving equitable access to health care.

The HEALTH Act would make permanent telehealth flexibilities for FQHCs and RHCs. These centers and clinics provide comprehensive care, including primary and preventive care services, for millions of Americans in medically underserved communities. This bill would allow FQHCs and RHCs to continue to serve as originating sites for telehealth and would lift geographic site restrictions on them as well. Further, it would allow these FQHCs and RHCs to be reimbursed by Medicare for audio-only telehealth permanently. The College supports these provisions as they would help to expand telehealth services to reach vulnerable communities throughout the country, making health care more accessible and equitable.



Should you have any questions on this legislation or on future telehealth legislation and hearings, ACP stands ready to offer the perspective of internal medicine clinicians. Please contact Vy Oxman, Senior Associate of Legislative Affairs, at 202-261-4515 or via email at voxman@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Omar Atiq".

Omar T. Atiq, MD, MACP
President