



October 25, 2024

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Carey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nikki Budzinski
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Luján and Representatives Budzinski and Carey,

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (College), thank you for your support of the *Affordable Connectivity Program*, which helped [23 million American households](#) across the country afford access to high-speed internet services and has since expired earlier this year. The College supports the provisions in [the Secure and Affordable Broadband Extension Act, S. 4317/H.R. 9193](#), that would fund the program and provide eligible households with a discount of \$30-75 per month off the cost of their internet service. By supporting this critical program, Congress would ensure that millions of Americans will continue to have the high-speed internet access needed to reach their health care practitioners, improving access to care for patients, including those with Medicare.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician membership society in the United States. Our 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 has been encouraged by recent congressional actions to extend the pandemic-era telehealth flexibilities, which have been instrumental in improving access to care for patients nationwide. We support the expanded role of telehealth as a method of health care delivery that can 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 is 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, limited paid sick leave, or insufficient work schedule flexibility to seek in-person care during the day, among many others.

While telehealth has many benefits, we remain concerned about its increasing inequities, as there are disparities in using telehealth services due to limited broadband access. A February



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2022 Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [publication](#) reported that telehealth utilization from April to October 2021 varied by race, region, education, income, and insurance. The nearest clinic may be hours away for those in rural and underserved communities. Even in communities where the infrastructure might allow for high-speed internet, low-income families cannot afford the necessary services to support telehealth and a continued connection with essential health care services. Limited access to broadband internet severely restricts the ability of many in these communities to access telemedicine.

Equitable access to broadband internet is critical to promoting health equity and improving care outcomes realized by telehealth. The College supports funding and continuing federal programs that support broadband access for rural or underserved populations. We strongly urge Congress to continue funding the *Affordable Connectivity Program*, which was critical in broadband deployment to reduce geographic and sociodemographic disparities and improve access to care. According to the [White House](#), military families comprised about half of the Affordable Connectivity Program's households. Latino and Black American households each accounted for approximately a quarter of households participating in the program. The program also supported 320,000 households on tribal lands, and four million American seniors and 10 million Americans over 50.

Once again, we thank you for your leadership on improving broadband access for Americans with support for the *Affordable Connectivity Program*, and we stand ready to support your efforts to fund this program. Should you have any questions, please contact Vy Oxman, Senior Associate of Legislative Affairs, at voxman@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

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

Isaac O. Opole, MBChB, PhD, MACP
President