

January 30, 2023

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Thompson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Schatz and Representative Thompson,

Thank you for your continued leadership to advance telehealth and the opportunity to provide comment regarding the reintroduction of the bipartisan, bicameral *Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act* in the 118th Congress. The Mental Health Liaison Group Telehealth Work Group consists of national organizations representing consumers, mental health and addiction professionals, advocates and payers that support the availability of telehealth.

We would urge any reintroduction of the *CONNECT for Health Act* to include a provision that would eliminate the in-person requirement for telemental health services as a prerequisite for coverage of a telehealth service that was passed within Section 123 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 ([P.L. 116-260](#)). Although the work group is appreciative of the efforts made by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to alleviate this access to care issue in the final [2023 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule](#) by extending in-person follow ups to every 12 months after the initial 6-month in-person visit, this provision is still inequitable for individuals with mental health conditions.

According to the [HHS Office of Inspector General](#), 28 million Medicare beneficiaries used telehealth during the first year of the pandemic. However, beneficiaries used telehealth for a larger share of their behavioral health services compared to other services—43% of beneficiaries for behavioral health services versus 13% of beneficiaries for office visits (E/M visits). Given the immense need for mental health services combined with acute behavioral health workforce shortages, the in-person telemental health provision is counter to the intent of ensuring more Americans receive life changing care; and, in fact, could further exacerbate our nation's growing mental health crisis.

We support in-person care when it is clinically appropriate or desired by the individual receiving services; however, the current in-person requirement is applied to all patients with mental health conditions regardless of whether such a visit is needed or wanted. As your offices are aware, there is no in-person requirement for individuals seeking medical services or substance use disorder treatment via telehealth.

Thank you for your consideration to this request and we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure the provision of mental services to Americans in need.

Sincerely,

American Psychiatric Association

American Telemedicine Association

American Telemedicine Association Action

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Centerstone

Jewish Federations of North America

Mental Health America

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

REDC Consortium

National Association of Social Workers

The Children's Hospital Association

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors