

## **Schatz, Wicker Lead Bipartisan Group Of 60 Senators In Introducing Legislation To Expand Telehealth Access, Make Permanent Telehealth Flexibilities**

WASHINGTON - Today, U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Mark Warner (D-Va.), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), and John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) led a bipartisan group of 60 senators in reintroducing the Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act. The CONNECT for Health Act will expand coverage of telehealth services through Medicare, make COVID-19 telehealth flexibilities permanent, improve health outcomes, and make it easier for patients to connect with their doctors. Current flexibilities are set to expire on September 30 unless Congress extends them.

"While telehealth use has rapidly increased in recent years, our laws have not kept up," said Senator Schatz. "Telehealth is helping people get the care they need, and it's here to stay. Our comprehensive bill makes it easier for more people to see their doctors no matter where they live."

"We live in a digital world, and our health services should reflect that. In the past decade, telehealth has made medical care more accessible for patients across the state and country," said Senator Wicker. "It is time to make telehealth coverage permanent for Medicare recipients so that more Americans, especially those in rural Mississippi, have access to health care."

In addition to Schatz, Wicker, Warner, Hyde-Smith, Welch, and Barrasso, the bill is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), John Thune (R-S.D.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), James Lankford (R-Okla.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.), John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.), Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), John Fetterman (D-Pa.), Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.V.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.), Tim Kaine (D-Va.), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), Katie Britt (R-Ala.), Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Angus King (I-Maine.), Jim Justice (R-W.V.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Eric Schmitt (R-Mo.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.), John Hoeven (R-N.D.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Roger Marshall (R-Kan.), Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.), Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Todd Young (R-Ind.), Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), Markwayne Mullin (R-Okla.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Steve Daines (R-Mont.), Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.), and John Boozman (R-Ark.).

Telehealth provides essential access to care with nearly a quarter of Americans accessing telehealth in a month, according to the most recent available data.

The CONNECT for Health Act would:

- \* Permanently remove all geographic restrictions on telehealth services and expand originating sites to the location of the patient, including homes;
- \* Permanently allow health centers and rural health clinics to provide telehealth services;
- \* Allow more eligible health care professionals to utilize telehealth services;
- \* Remove unnecessary in-person visit requirement for telemental health services;
- \* Allow for the waiver of telehealth restrictions during public health emergencies; and
- \* Require more published data to learn more about how telehealth is being used, impacts of quality of care, and how it can be improved to support patients and health care providers.

The CONNECT for Health Act was first introduced in 2016 and is considered the most comprehensive legislation on telehealth in Congress. Since 2016, several provisions of the bill have been enacted into law or adopted by the Centers for Medicare Medicaid Services, including provisions to remove restrictions on telehealth services for mental health, stroke care, and home dialysis.

"Telehealth services have proven to be a safe and effective form of medical care. Through the expansion of telehealth services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, more patients have received quality, affordable care. I'm glad to introduce legislation that will make permanent some of these services and ensure Virginians continue to access affordable health care when they need it, and where they need it," said Senator Warner .

"Even before the pandemic, Mississippi recognized the vital role of telehealth. Across America, rural communities, the elderly, and those with mobility challenges have long struggled to access traditional healthcare," said Senator Hyde- Smith . "This legislation is essential to delivering affordable, accessible, and quality care that Americans deserve, and I'm proud to continue this years-long effort to expand telehealth services."

"The COVID-19 pandemic proved that telehealth not only works, but is essential," said Senator Welch . "Rural and underserved areas in Vermont and across the country desperately need solutions to address the widening gap in health care access, and increasing telehealth services must be part of the answer. This bipartisan bill takes commonsense steps to help bridge that gap and make sure that our policies adapt to the capabilities of our technology."

"Telehealth is a critical for rural states like Wyoming," said Senator Barrasso . "It has given folks access to specialized care no matter where they live. This important bipartisan bill will make it easier for Medicare patients, especially those in remote areas, to continue to have access to the health care they need."

The CONNECT for Health Act has the support of more than 150 organizations including the American Medical Association, AARP, American Hospital Association, National Association of Community Health Centers, National Association of Rural Health Clinics, and American Telemedicine Association.

The full text of the bill is available here <https://www.schatz.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/connect1.pdf>.

Read this original document at:

<https://www.schatz.senate.gov/news/press-releases/schatz-wicker-lead-bipartisan-group-of-60-senators-in-introducing-le>