

May 3, 2021

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
United States Senate  
722 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
United States Senate  
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Schatz and Wicker:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) writes in support of the CONNECT for Health Act of 2021 (S.1512/H.R. 2903).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth has provided a critical way for patients to continue to access needed care. We applaud the introduction of this bill, which proposes many changes that would allow for increased access to telehealth services for patients and use by hospitals and other providers, while removing barriers to adoption.

Specifically, we strongly support the provision in the legislation that would permanently remove the geographic and originating restrictions that currently limit where patients can access telehealth services. We also appreciate expansion of telehealth for emergency medical care, along with the ability to waive restrictions on the use of telehealth during national and public health emergencies.

In addition, the AHA supports allowing rural health clinics (RHCs) and federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) to serve as distant sites, so that these facilities may use the providers at their own sites to offer care to patients, ensuring patients remain connected to their primary providers. These sites are important partners to hospitals, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The AHA supports allowing critical access hospitals the same ability to offer and bill for telehealth services.

Further, we support that the legislation encourages the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) to test expanded telehealth flexibilities through alternative payment models. We also support requiring the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to adopt a more flexible approach to adding new telehealth services to Medicare that



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more proactively considers the positive impact of telehealth on access to care. This bill takes important steps toward achieving these goals.

Finally, as Congress continues to consider meaningful ways to improve the promise of telehealth, we want to emphasize that current Medicare reimbursement for telehealth services does not provide adequate support to all sites of care. For providers to be able to continue delivering high-quality patient care through telehealth and other virtual services, they need appropriate reimbursement for the substantial upfront and ongoing costs of establishing and maintaining their virtual infrastructure. We urge Congress to work with CMS to ensure the ability of providers to deliver high-quality care and improved patient outcomes.

We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working together to ensure passage of the CONNECT for Health Act.

Sincerely,

/s/

Stacey Hughes  
Executive Vice President  
Government Relations and Public Policy