

THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

December 3, 2024

Dear New England Congressional Delegation:

I write to you today regarding Congressional efforts to ensure that all Medicare beneficiaries have access to telehealth services before the temporary waivers expire on December 31, 2024. As you may know, the New England Council is a non-partisan alliance of businesses, academic and health institutions, and public and private organizations throughout New England. Our mission is to promote economic growth and a high quality of life in the region, and it is with that background that I urge you to consider ongoing efforts to reauthorize telehealth services, a key component in addressing the mental and physical challenges facing our region.

As you are aware, Congress has recognized the critical role of telehealth in health care delivery by expanding coverage during and after the COVID-19 public health emergency. Most recently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 extended several Medicare telehealth flexibilities through December 31, 2024. Among these was a provision allowing patients to use telehealth regardless of where they are located. These short-term extensions have been important to allow continuity of care and providing time for experts to evaluate the benefits of expanded telehealth services.

In particular, trends in behavioral health service use in the context of telehealth have seen a significant evolution in recent years. In the fields of addiction and behavioral health, services provided under telehealth were not limited to individual therapy sessions, but extended to group therapy, psychiatric evaluations, as well as crisis interventions. According to HHS [data](#), in 2021, telehealth made up 35% of visits to behavioral health specialists.

Additionally, as you consider reauthorizing telehealth services, we ask that you take equity into consideration. Telehealth services have greatly expanded access for patients of various backgrounds, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Telehealth services have in part reduced geographical barriers, provided culturally tailored services, increased accessibility to specialists, while also providing healthcare at home for vulnerable populations. While in discussions with colleagues, we urge you to consider socioeconomic factors such as income, education, or place of residence, and consider how to continue streamlining services for patients who may have various disabilities, limited access to technology, or patients who may have lower digital literacy rates.

This is a pivotal time for telehealth policy, and it is critical that we enact long-term legislation before the flexibilities expire later this year. Telehealth is a cost-effective way to improve access to care and our members are in agreement that we must provide patients and clinicians long-term certainty about access to care through telehealth.

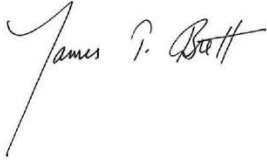
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The New England Council urges you and your colleagues to consider extending telehealth flexibilities given the way it has revolutionized the way that care is administered and received across the country. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sean Malone on my staff at smalone@newenglandcouncil.com.

We appreciate your collaboration on this important issue and look forward to working with you to ensure access to telehealth services is available on a permanent basis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James T. Brett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

James T. Brett
President & CEO

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