



Support Permanent Access to Telehealth by Qualified Rehabilitation Professionals

The National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies (NARA) is convinced that telehealth has played a crucial role in providing needed care to patients during the pandemic. It has become increasingly clear that telehealth's many benefits should and must be utilized well beyond the COVID-19 health emergency.

The Expanded Telehealth Access Act of 2021 (H.R. 2168), introduced by Reps. Mikie Sherrill, D-NJ, and David McKinley, R-WV, would add qualified private practice and facility-based rehabilitation professionals as permanent authorized providers of telehealth under the Medicare program.

The Expanded Telehealth Access Act would permanently allow outpatient therapy providers to use telehealth under Medicare after the public health emergency is over. Specifically, the bill adds physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, audiologists, and speech language pathologists, and facilities that furnish outpatient therapy, as authorized providers of telehealth under Medicare.

In the Senate, Senators Susan Collins (R-ME), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Senators Roger Marshall (R-KS) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) have reintroduced the **Home Health Emergency Access to Telehealth (HEAT) Act** (S. 1309). The new legislation calls for permitting CMS the authority to issue a waiver that would allow for telehealth visits to count towards in-person visits as included on the plan of care in the event of a public health emergency (PHE).

Examples of Telehealth care in Rehabilitation

- Therapists use telehealth to conduct evaluations when necessary, to prevent delays in essential care.
- Therapists use telehealth by guiding patients through prescribed exercises, analyzing patients' performance, and instructing modifications of care plans.
- Therapists use telehealth to assess a patient's home environment and recommend adjustments that improve safety and navigation.
- Therapists use telehealth to reduce the number of in-clinic visits and still maintain important monitoring and follow-up care. This is especially important for Medicare patients who lack transportation or socio-economic means for multidiscipline in person visits.
- Therapists can use telehealth to co-treat with another clinician who is treating via real-time audio and video technology.
- Therapists can utilize telehealth to supervise treatment being provided by an assistant in a patient's home.

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- Telehealth is well-suited for rehabilitation therapies, especially when used as an enhancement to services rather than exclusively as a replacement. Education and home exercise programs, including those focused on activities of daily living and fall prevention are particularly well suited for telehealth because the therapist is able to evaluate and treat the patient within the real-life context of their home environment. A patient and/or caregiver's ability to interact in their own environment with a therapist when they are facing a challenge, rather than waiting for the next appointment, can be invaluable in supporting the adoption of effective strategies to improve function, enhance safety, and promote engagement.
- Telerehabilitation has been shown to improve access to care for patients who live in rural areas. It has allowed patients to gain desired outcomes for a variety of health problems, including post traumatic stress syndrome, chronic pain, stroke, and other neurological and musculoskeletal conditions.
- A 2019 study examined the efficacy of home-based telerehabilitation versus in-clinic therapy for adults after stroke, finding that poststroke activity-based training resulted in substantial gains in patients' arm motor function, whether provided via telerehabilitation or in person.
- Increasing access to rehabilitation therapy services, including through audio and video telecommunications technology can decrease healthcare costs by reducing hospital admissions, and readmissions, emergency department visits, and urgent care visits. Patients have improved compliance to clinical care with better clinical outcomes.
- The National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies strongly supports **The Expanded Telehealth Access Act of 2021 (H.R. 2168)** and urge you to cosponsor this legislation. Introduced by Reps. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) and David McKinley, (R-WV). This bill is also endorsed by the American Physical Therapy Association, the American Telehealth Association, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Occupational Therapy Association, the eHealth Initiative and Foundation, the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, Inc., the Personal Connected Health Alliance, and the Alliance for Connected Care.
- The National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies strongly supports **Home Health Emergency Access to Telehealth (HEAT) Act (S. 1309)** and urges you to co-sponsor this legislation introduced by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Senators Roger Marshall (R-KS) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

NARA is the trade association representing 90+ organizations consisting of over 45,000 healthcare professionals dedicated to providing a multitude of skilled rehabilitation therapy services to individuals in a variety of settings including inpatient, outpatient, skilled care, assisted living, educational systems, industry/occupational health.