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## **Telehealth Legislation Protects Virtual Healthcare Beyond COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Healthcare providers, professionals, advocates support continued access to quality, affordable virtual care*

Springfield—The Coalition to Protect Telehealth has announced support for a legislative proposal to protect Illinoisans’ access to the innovative telehealth services they have relied on receiving from health care professionals and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduced by State Rep. Deb Conroy (46<sup>th</sup> House District), [House Bill 3498](#) ensures quality, affordable and safe virtual healthcare that improves patient outcomes by reducing access barriers will continue to be provided after the COVID-19 pandemic. Critically, the legislation aligns telehealth coverage and payment with in-person care, making appropriate patient access to care the priority.

“Over the last year, we’ve seen significant, rapid development in telehealth technology. Initially spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, both state and federal government enacted policy changes to make telehealth services easier to access and, as a result, healthcare providers, professionals and patients have seen that virtual care preserves quality and safety, while also accommodating patients’ individual needs,” said Rep. Conroy. “Illinois should support this continued investment in telehealth and the important role it will play in modernizing healthcare delivery and empowering patients.”

Importantly, House Bill 3498 prohibits geographic or facility restrictions on telehealth services, and allows patients to be treated via telehealth in their home. The legislation establishes patients will not be required to use a separate panel of providers or professionals to receive telehealth services, nor would they be required to prove a hardship or access barrier in order to receive telehealth services. The legislation further protects patient preference by establishing a patient cannot be required to use telehealth services.

Additionally, House Bill 3498 gives healthcare providers and professionals the professional latitude to determine the appropriateness of specific sites and technology platforms for telehealth services, while upholding federal and state privacy laws.

Even as in-person visits have resumed, telehealth use has remained at a persistent and significant level, with strong indication from patients, healthcare providers and professionals that this flexibility to access care must be maintained permanently.

Telehealth use has been demonstrated to increase care plan adherence and improved chronic disease management, and in recent surveys, over 70% of Illinois hospital respondents and 78% of community-based behavioral healthcare respondents reported that telehealth has helped drive a reduction in the rates at which patients missed appointments. Surveys of Illinois physicians, community health centers, and specialized mental health and substance use disorder treatment providers have also revealed similar dramatic reductions in missed appointments.

Stakeholders underscored that telehealth should also be embraced as a key strategy to address social determinants of health that can act as barriers to accessing in-person care. Access barriers that exacerbate healthcare disparities such as transportation, lost income, missed work and school, or the stigma of seeking help, are greatly reduced or eliminated when telehealth is used. Patients are empowered to address care needs swiftly, preventing conditions from worsening and requiring unnecessary visits to urgent care or a hospital.

[Before the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency](#), 36 states had coverage parity policies and 16 states had payment parity for commercial health plans, but Illinois did not require either. For Medicaid, 21 states had coverage parity policies and 28 states had payment parity. While Illinois offers limited Medicaid coverage for telehealth services, it has no laws that direct the Medicaid program to treat telehealth and in-person services the same for these purposes.

More information about the Coalition and how permanent telehealth coverage offers patient-centered care that improves access, reduces barriers and promotes equity-driven care can be found at [protectillinoisitelehealth.org](http://protectillinoisitelehealth.org)

The Coalition to Protect Telehealth includes: AARP Illinois; American Academy of Pediatrics- Illinois Chapter; Affordable Assisted Living Coalition; AIDS Foundation Chicago; American Nurses Association – Illinois; Association of Community Mental Health Authorities of IL; Community Behavioral Healthcare Association; Healthcare Council of Illinois; Heartland Alliance; Illinois Academy of Family Physicians; Illinois Academy of Physician Assistants; Illinois Association for Behavioral Health; Illinois Association of Prescribing Psychologists; Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network; Illinois Health and Hospital Association; Illinois Health Care Association; Illinois Homecare & Hospice Council; Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization; Illinois Occupational Therapy Association; Illinois Osteopathic Medical Society; Illinois Physical Therapy Association; Illinois Primary Health Care Association; Illinois Psychiatric Society; Illinois Psychological Association; Illinois Society for Advanced Practice Nursing; Illinois State Medical Society; LeadingAge Illinois; National Association of Social Workers – Illinois Chapter; National Multiple Sclerosis Society; Southern Illinois University System; and The Kennedy Forum.