Telehealth Expansion: A Critical Opportunity for Congress

WASHINGTON - Jan. 24, 2025 - *PRLog* -- As the 119th Congress begins its work, the Center for Telehealth and e-Health Law (CTeL) is calling on lawmakers to prioritize telehealth expansion in the upcoming reconciliation bill. This legislative moment represents a pivotal opportunity to safeguard Medicare telehealth access and address cost challenges, including the growing issue of facility fees.

"Telehealth is no longer a temporary pandemic solution—it's a vital part of our healthcare system," said Christa Natoli, Executive Director of CTeL. "Congress has a chance to protect and expand these services to ensure equitable care for millions of Americans, especially those in rural and underserved communities."

In its recent comment letter to congressional leaders, CTeL highlighted the importance of the Preserving Telehealth, Hospital, and Ambulance Access Act. This legislation proposes extending Public Health Emergency (PHE) telehealth waivers through 2026. These waivers removed outdated geographic site restrictions, expanded practitioner eligibility, and enabled federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and rural health clinics (RHCs) to provide telehealth services.

"Extending these waivers will ensure continued access to care while giving policymakers the time needed to evaluate telehealth's long-term impacts," Natoli added.

CTeL's research shows that telehealth is primarily substitutive, not additive, to in-person care. It improves access without increasing service volume or fraud—debunking long-held concerns about cost.

CTeL is also advocating for action on facility fees, which can significantly increase costs for patients receiving telehealth services. These fees are often charged by hospitals even when patients are seen virtually, creating financial strain and confusion.

The organization is urging Congress to follow the lead of states like Connecticut, which passed a 2024 law prohibiting facility fees for telehealth services. Federal action on this issue would ensure that telehealth remains a cost-effective option for patients nationwide.

CTeL has a longstanding commitment to evidence-based advocacy. The organization is commissioning new research to provide Congress and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) with updated insights into telehealth's utilization trends and cost impacts.

Early findings suggest telehealth usage has stabilized at sustainable levels, offering a clear opportunity to build a robust framework for its future. Extending the PHE waivers through 2026 would provide the critical runway needed to gather comprehensive data and inform permanent policy decisions.

"Telehealth has transformed care delivery, making it more accessible and equitable than ever before," Natoli said. "Now is the time for Congress to solidify these gains by removing barriers and protecting patients from unnecessary costs."

CTeL remains steadfast in its mission to partner with lawmakers, researchers, and advocates to ensure telehealth becomes a cornerstone of a modern, patient-centered healthcare system.

To learn more about CTeL's work or to support its initiatives, visit www.ctel.org.

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