



Support Permanent Access to Telehealth by Qualified Rehabilitation Professionals

The National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies (NARA) believes that telehealth has played a crucial role in providing needed care to patients during the pandemic. Congress extended the Medicare telehealth flexibilities to December 31, 2024, through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. Telehealth is crucial for rehabilitation beneficiaries, providing uninterrupted access to care, timely interventions, and empowering treatment experiences.

Telehealth Modernization Act of 2024 (HR 7623) is a bipartisan bill introduced in March 2024 by Reps. Earl “Buddy” Carter (R-GA), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE), Gregory Steube (R-FL), Terri Sewell (D-AL), Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA), Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Jefferson Van Drew (R-NJ), and Joseph Morelle (D-NY) and would remove the December 31, 2024 sunset of the provision in the *Telehealth Modernization Act* including physical therapists, physical therapy assistants, occupational therapists, occupational therapist assistants and speech language pathologists as Medicare telehealth providers. Additionally, it would end the Medicare telehealth restrictions on both the “Geographic and originating site” permanently expanding access to telehealth for Medicare beneficiaries and allow the use of audio-only telecommunications technology.

The Expanded Telehealth Access Act of 2024 (HR 3875/S 2880), these bi-partisan bills introduced in the House by Reps. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), Diana Harshbarger (R-TN), Andre Carson (D-IN), David Valadao (R-CA), Jennifer Kiggans (R-VA), Mark Pocan (D-WI) and Glenn Thompson (R-PA); and introduced in the Senate by Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT), Tina Smith (D-MN), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and John Boozman (R-AR) would add physical therapists, physical therapy assistants, occupational therapists, occupational therapist assistants and speech language pathologists as permanent authorized providers of telehealth under the Medicare program. This legislation marks a crucial step towards embedding telehealth as a permanent component of healthcare provision.

Expanding Americans’ Telehealth Options (HR 8151) is a bipartisan legislation introduced by House Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health members Rep. Mike Thompson (CA-04), Mike Kelly (PA-16), and Adrian Smith (NE-03). This bill would permanently expand the list of practitioners eligible who provide telehealth services to include qualified physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and audiologists.

While we are supportive of language in the CONNECT Act it does not provide permanent access for therapy rehabilitation providers as authorized providers of telehealth services. The above-mentioned bills allow for greater beneficiary access to telehealth services. [Therapy Coalition letter to House Energy & Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Health Hearing on Access to Telehealth Services.](#)

Benefits of Telehealth and Rehabilitation Therapy

- Guiding patients through targeted movements, analyzing performance, and modifying plans of care
- Assessing home environments to enhance safety and navigation, a service often inaccessible through traditional outpatient therapy
- Reducing in-clinic visits while ensuring essential assessment and follow-up care, particularly beneficial for Medicare patients facing transportation or socioeconomic challenges
- Access to specialists through real-time audio-video technology
- Timely evaluations to prevent care delays and meeting treatment supervision requirements

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Enhancing Patient Outcomes Through Telehealth

- Improving access to care for rural patients or patients with limited transportation options, enhancing outcomes for various health conditions including stroke, chronic pain, and neurological disorders.
- In a 2019¹ research study indicated comparable efficacy between home-based telehealth and in-clinic therapy for post-stroke rehabilitation.
- A 2022 study² of the use of telehealth in disadvantaged neighborhoods for Medicare beneficiaries reveals that these patients have higher utilization of telehealth.
- Another 2022 study³ of more than 200,000 patients with a variety of conditions showed consistently positive results for telerehab.
- Telehealth utilization leads to cost savings by reducing hospital admissions, readmissions, and emergency visits, while promoting better compliance and clinical outcomes.
- Direct interaction with therapists in familiar settings empowers patients and caregivers to address challenges promptly, fostering effective strategies to enhance function, safety, and engagement.

Telehealth integration into rehabilitation therapy represents a significant advancement in healthcare accessibility and efficiency. Supporting legislation for permanent telehealth access by qualified professionals is vital for enhancing patient outcomes, reducing healthcare disparities, and fostering a more resilient healthcare system.

Recommendations to Congress:

- **Support and Pass *Telehealth Modernization Act of 2024 (HR 7623)***. Senate support introduction of companion bill.
- **Support and Pass *The Expanded Telehealth Access Act of 2024 (HR 3875 and S 2880)*** which would instruct CMS to permanently adopt the current temporary waiver of restrictions on Medicare payment for services delivered via telehealth by physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and speech-language pathologists.
- **Support and Pass *Expanding Americans' Telehealth Options (HR 8151)***. Senate support introduction of companion bill.

NARA is the trade association representing 100+ organizations consisting of over 90,000 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.

¹ Efficacy of Home-Based Telerehabilitation vs In-Clinic Therapy for Adults After Stroke: A Randomized Clinical Trial
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31233135/>

² Medicare Beneficiaries In Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Increased Telemedicine Use During The COVID-19 Pandemic
<https://www.apta.org/article/2022/06/21/telehealth-usage-disadvantaged-communities>

³ Using Telehealth to Guarantee the Continuity of Rehabilitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review
<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/16/10325>