

Telemedicine

Americans for Prosperity empowers people to earn success, contribute to their communities, and live meaningful lives. This requires a health care system that helps more people access better care at a lower cost—where health care providers compete to offer the best health care products and services at the best prices that meet the needs of patients. Unfortunately, many state and federal laws act as barriers to access and innovation.

One way to help providers effectively meet the needs of patients is to reform state regulations that prevent physicians and other health care providers from remotely delivering care through telemedicine.

WHAT IS TELEMEDICINE?

Telemedicine is an umbrella term for telecommunication technologies health care providers offer to remotely diagnose, treat, and monitor patients around the country. Telemedicine ensures that families, especially individuals that reside in underserved rural and urban communities, can access health care in a timely manner when medical providers are not readily available. If patients cannot remotely access telemedicine services, they will have to wait longer, travel farther, and pay more for the health care they need.

EXPANDING TELEMEDICINE RESULTS IN BETTER CARE AT LOWER COSTS

Although many health care services could be delivered through telemedicine, many states impose a variety of barriers on providers who seek to remotely deliver care to patients. For example, many states require that patients meet with a doctor in person before they can receive remote consultations.

States also mandate that patients receive virtual consultations at specific locations, such as a hospital or a rural health clinic, which prevents them from receiving consultations at home.

These restrictions have significantly contributed to the growing physician shortage communities face around the country. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nearly 80 million Americans live in communities that face a physician shortage.¹

These physician shortages impose long-lasting and even fatal harm on America's most vulnerable patients. Individuals who lack a reliable source of primary care experience delays in diagnosis, pay higher health care costs, and die earlier than patients who can regularly access basic medical care.²

WHY STATES NEED TELEMEDICINE

Empowering health care providers to deliver telemedicine is a crucial element of comprehensive health care reforms that will increase health care access. At least 38 percent of in-person visits, including 27 percent of emergency department visits, could be remotely delivered by qualified providers through telemedicine.³

Providing these important services through telemedicine would significantly improve patient health. Many rural hospitals that lack in-person stroke specialists utilize telemedicine to remotely video conference with specialists who can recommend diagnosis and treatments.⁴ Multiple studies have found telestroke interventions helped hospitals significantly lower mortality rates for stroke patients.⁵

Increasing access to telemedicine would also lower healthcare costs. Telemedicine-based home health

programs in the Veterans Health Administration have reduced the rate of hospitalizations by up to 40 percent by remotely monitoring chronically ill patients and providing timely interventions. These innovations saved nearly \$6,500 for every individual within the program.⁶

As lawmakers consider their options to remove barriers on telemedicine, they should pursue the following reforms to make their efforts most impactful:

- 1. In-person consultation requirements:**
States should eliminate laws that mandate that providers meet with patients before they offer telemedicine services.
- 2. Barriers on non-physician providers:**
States should allow all non-physician providers, including physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses, to practice to the full extent of their training through telemedicine.
- 3. Bans on telemedicine prescribing:**
States should repeal laws that prohibit providers from remotely prescribing medications, including controlled substances, through telemedicine.
- 4. Restrictions on locations:**
States should eliminate laws that mandate that patients access telemedicine services in specific locations and settings.
- 5. Cross-state telemedicine:**
States and the federal government should allow patients to access telemedicine services from providers licensed in other states.
- 6. Telemedicine parity:**
States should eliminate laws that mandate insurers reimburse for telemedicine services at the same rate as services delivered in person.
- 7. Telemedicine in Medicare and Medicaid:**
Medicare and Medicaid should reimburse providers that deliver telemedicine services to beneficiaries.
- 8. Telemedicine in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA):**
The Department of Veterans Affairs should allow trainees, fellows, and residents who practice medicine within the VHA to deliver telemedicine services to veterans across state lines.

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