



Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
On Behalf of the American Academy of PAs

On behalf of more than 140,000 PAs (physician assistants), the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding the 6/17 hearing held by the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on “Telehealth: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

AAPA would like to thank Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray for holding this important hearing, and for their years of work towards improving adoption of and access to telehealth services. AAPA would also like to thank the Committee and Congress for the bipartisan leadership shown thus far in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. These are difficult times for patients, healthcare providers, and the general public. While Congress and the Administration have already taken several critical steps to help mitigate the impact of this pandemic, there is need for additional action to make healthcare services more accessible to patients and make more efficient use of our healthcare workforce, particularly through continued and expanded access to telehealth services. Finally, AAPA would like to thank the panel of witnesses for their participation.

PAs, along with physicians and advanced practice registered nurses, provide services to Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. PAs are medical professionals who conduct physical exams, order and interpret tests, diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medications, assist in surgery, and counsel on preventative healthcare. With thousands of hours of medical training, PAs are versatile and collaborative and often serve as a patient’s principal healthcare provider. PAs practice in every medical setting and specialty and are already a significant part of the on the ground efforts to diagnose and treat COVID-19. PAs are an essential and growing part of the healthcare delivery system, and it is important to ensure that PAs are authorized to fully participate and be recognized in any telehealth improvements.

AAPA has long advocated for the expansion of telehealth services and the advancement of telehealth technology. Expanding the availability of telehealth services to patients will improve access to cost-effective and quality healthcare. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, expanding access to telehealth services will lead to better health outcomes by reducing strain on healthcare facilities and reducing the amount of in-person interactions and opportunities for the spread of COVID-19 in healthcare settings.

As telehealth expands and its usage by patients and facilities grows, AAPA asks Congress to continue to ensure the full inclusion of PAs as eligible providers of telehealth services in order to meet the objectives of improving patient outcomes, expanding access to care, and providing a favorable patient experience.

Congress should also take steps to encourage or incentivize states to remove unnecessary existing practice barriers that may limit a PA’s ability to deliver telehealth services. The Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury and Labor, along with the Federal Trade Commission and other administration stakeholders, issued a report in December 2018 entitled *Reforming America’s Healthcare System Through Choice and Competition*, which urged that, in order to develop a better functioning healthcare market and improve the health of Americans, states should consider eliminating 1) requirements for rigid collaborative practice and supervision agreements between physicians and PAs, and 2) statutes and rules that unnecessarily limit services PAs and other professionals can offer.

Encouraging states to remove unnecessary and burdensome restrictions will reduce legal, administrative, and financial barriers to PA practice, increasing opportunities for PAs and physicians to engage in direct patient care. Further, it would expand opportunities for PAs to engage in telehealth practice, thereby increasing the number of healthcare providers available to reach patients in rural and underserved areas. Currently, many telehealth companies do not hire PAs due to the burdensome supervisory requirements which vary from state-to-state and increase costs and red tape for such companies.

AAPA also urges Congress to include the Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act (S. 2741/H.R. 4932) in the next COVID relief package to improve access to telehealth. The CONNECT Act would expand the use of telehealth and remote patient monitoring services in Medicare toward the goal of cost savings and quality care, of particular importance during the time of COVID-19 as we seek to limit exposure and transmission and make the best use of our healthcare workforce and PPE. We also request that telehealth services be reimbursed at a rate that encourages their continued adoption and utilization.

AAPA is committed to working with Congress on how to best respond to COVID-19 and looks forward to a continued working relationship with Congress to ensure the best possible care for all telehealth beneficiaries. Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement, and please do not hesitate to contact Tate Heuer, AAPA Vice President, Federal Advocacy, at 571-319-4338 or theuer@aapa.org, with any questions.