

Private Practice Physical Therapists

Small business professionals restoring function to America - one patient at a time.

SEEKING PERMANENT MEDICARE COVERAGE OF PHYSICAL THERAPY PROVIDED VIA TELEHEALTH

RECOMMENDATION: The Private Practice Section (PPS) of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) urges Congress to pass legislation to permanently enable physical therapists to provide physical therapy services to Medicare beneficiaries via telehealth.

BACKGROUND:

Under current law, physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are not able to use telehealth to provide care to Medicare beneficiaries. The *CARES Act*, enacted March 27, 2020, granted CMS authority to waive statutory restrictions during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). CMS used this waiver authority to enable physical therapists to bill for telehealth services furnished to Medicare Part B beneficiaries—but only for the duration of the PHE. When the PHE is over, this Medicare coverage for telehealth care will also end.

CMS does not have the regulatory authority to *permanently* extend payment to these providers. To achieve this policy change, Congress must enact legislation to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries can continue accessing their physical therapy care via telehealth, in addition to traditional in-person care.

While the use of telehealth clearly does not eliminate the need for in-person visits, it can enhance delivery and coordination of care, reduce barriers, and increase access to a greater variety of providers. Studies have shown that physical therapist use of telerehabilitation can result in cost savings, improved outcomes, increased access, and higher patient satisfaction. By providing assessments, care, and interventions via telehealth, physical therapists can prevent falls, reduce functional decline, avoid costly emergency room visits, and reduce hospital admissions as well as readmissions—all while reducing disparities in care.

PPS' legislative priority: to permanently enable therapists to provide care via telehealth:

- **Expanded Telehealth Access Act (S.3193/H.R.2168)** would permanently add physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and other rehabilitation therapists to the statutory list of distant site providers that Medicare pays for telehealth.

A step in the right direction, but don't achieve PPS' legislative priority:

- **Telehealth Modernization Act (S.368/ H.R.1332)** as a part of **Cures 2.0 (H.R.6000)** would enable the Secretary of HHS to permanently expand the types of health care providers that can offer telehealth services and the types of services that can be reimbursed under Medicare, but this bill does not ensure the inclusion of physical therapists in this list.
- **Telehealth Extension Act (H.R.6202)** would extend the current PHE-related telehealth waivers for an additional 2 years. H.R.6202 would also remove the current originating site and geographic limitations from the statute; this would allow all providers authorized to provide care via telehealth to Medicare beneficiaries to do so without the current site or location restrictions. However, until physical therapists are allowed to provide care via telehealth on a permanent basis (see *Expanded Telehealth Access Act* above), this change in site restrictions will not benefit private practice physical therapists.
- **Telehealth Extension and Evaluation Act (S.3593)** would extend Medicare payments for an additional 2 years.

Using telehealth to provide physical therapy has been shown to provide access to safe and effective care which also results in high-quality outcomes. Legislation is needed to allow Medicare beneficiaries to permanently access therapy care via telehealth in addition to traditional in-person care.

To cosponsor S.3193, contact Rachel Green (rachel_green@daines.senate.gov) in Sen. Daines' office. Contact Artin Haghshenas (artin.haghshenas@mail.house.gov) in Representative Sherrill's office **to cosponsor H.R.2168**.