

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: APTA Private Practice, a Section 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 of 2020* granted CMS authority to waive statutory restrictions during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) and thereby enabling Medicare to reimburse rehabilitation therapists for care provided via telehealth. With the enactment of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022*, rehabilitation therapists were granted coverage for an additional 151-days after the PHE expires.

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.

APTA Private Practice's 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 our legislative priority:

- **Advancing Telehealth Beyond COVID-19 Act** (H.R. 4040) would extend current PHE-linked coverage of telehealth and flexibility in originating sites through December 31, 2024.
- **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 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 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.

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 Isaac Loeb (isaac.loeb@mail.house.gov) in Representative Sherrill's office to cosponsor H.R.2168.