



March 16, 2021

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 32 (Aguiar-Curry) – Telehealth: Health Care Access – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Wood:

As the California Telehealth Policy Coalition, we are proud to support Assembly Bill 32, which seeks to require the State Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to make permanent the current telehealth flexibilities put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure all patients continue to have this increased access to care moving forward.

The California Telehealth Policy Coalition is a nonpartisan affiliation of over 100 diverse organizations and individuals that meets monthly to discuss cooperative means of advancing telehealth policy and emerging telehealth policy issues in California. The Coalition began in 2011 when AB 415, The Telehealth Advancement Act, was introduced, and has continued to meet as telehealth becomes ever more integral to health care delivery in California, especially recently and in light of the additional strain COVID-19 has placed on our health system.

Prior to COVID-19, California's Medicaid program (Medi-Cal) had one of the most robust telehealth policies in the nation. While Medi-Cal had updated their Provider Manual in the summer of 2019 with more expansive policy around telehealth, even with these progressive policies, temporary changes were needed to allow telehealth to be utilized more widely and effectively in the face of COVID-19. Therefore, as a result of the public health emergency (PHE), DHCS implemented additional flexibilities to expand telehealth flexibilities, such as requiring reimbursement parity for all telehealth modalities, including telephone, and allowing Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) to bill for telehealth and telephonic encounters. The changes not only increased access to care but made sure patients and most-at-risk individuals could continue to access necessary care from their providers without risking exposure to the coronavirus or forgoing treatment altogether. Further, telehealth has been shown to address existing health inequities, and according to the CDC, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has only increased those barriers to healthcare for racial and ethnic minority groups, representing the majority of California's essential workforce.

AB 32 and Coalition principles support efforts that will promote access and coverage of telehealth services, which continues to increasingly show its value in connecting all patients to providers through all telehealth technologies, including telephone and store-and-forward



modalities. Given the existing broadband divide, live video is not an available possibility for many of our already-underserved populations, therefore maintaining coverage and reimbursement parity for each of these modalities becomes vital in order to not further exacerbate existing disparities post-pandemic. For instance, a study recently published in JAMA found that eliminating coverage for telephone visits could disproportionately affect underserved populations and threaten the ability of FQHCs to meet patient needs.¹ In addition, existing California law – separate from the current emergency flexibilities – ensures commercial payors reimburse all telehealth modalities at parity. Therefore, AB 32 will be crucial to closing these statutory gaps for Medi-Cal patients, so they will continue to have equitable access through telehealth as well.

Continuation of the current California telehealth flexibilities is a critical component of telehealth policy and health care access infrastructure and will help pave the way for future health care innovation and advancement. For these reasons, we are pleased to support AB 32 and we respectfully request your aye vote on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

California Telehealth Policy Coalition

MEMBERS SUPPORTING THIS BILL:

2020 Mom

AARP, California

Adventist Health

Advocates for Health, Economics and Development (AHEAD) Alliance for Patient Access

Alameda Health Consortium

Alliance for Patient Access

America's Physician Groups

American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA)

American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 2 (AAP-CA2)

American Telemedicine Association

ARC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

Association of California Healthcare Districts

BKY Consulting

Buchalter, PC

Burnish Creative

California Academy of PAs

California Alliance of Child and Family Services

California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT)

California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems

¹ Lori Uscher-Pines, Jessica Sousa, Maggie Jones. Telehealth Use Among Safety-Net Organizations in California During the COVID-19 Pandemic. JAMA. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2776166>. Published February 2, 2021. Accessed February 8, 2021.



California Children's Hospital Association
California Children Trust
California Chronic Care Coalition
California Chronic Care Coalition San Diego County
California Commission on Aging
California Dental Hygienists' Association
California Health Collaborative
California Health Information Association
California Hospital Association
California Long-Term Care Ombudsman Association
California Medical Association
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
California Primary Care Association
California Psychological Association
California School Based Health Alliance
California Telehealth Network
Camicia
Center for Autism
Center for Care Innovations
Center for Health and Technology
Center for Technology and Aging
Central California Alliance for Health
Children's Specialty Care Coalition
Cisco
Citizen Advocacy Center
Clinical Informatics, Inc.
ClinIQ
Coalition for Multi-State Licensure in California Nurses Taskforce
Cognivive
CommonSpirit Health
Community Health Center Network
Community Health Partnership
Connecting to Care
Digital Health Strategy and Alliances
DirectDerm
Doctor on Demand
Easterseals Southern California
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Essential Access Health
Family Caregiver Alliance, National Center of Caregiving
For Hims/For Hers
Granite Wellness Centers
Health Care Interpreter Network
Health Reveal
HIMSS, Northern California Chapter

IDEATE California
LeadingAge California
Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health
Manifest Medex
Maven Project
Mile High Health Alliance
mPulse
Multi-state Licensure for California Nurses Taskforce
MVM Strategy Group
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Health Law Program
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
NL Short Public Affairs
North East Medical Services (NEMS)
Noteware Government Relations
OCHIN
Pacific Health Consulting Group
Partnership HealthPlan of California
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California
Providence
Psychiatric Physicians Alliance of California
Quio
Rady Children's Hospital - San Diego
Resolution Care
River City Medical Group
Sacramento Case Management Society of America
San Francisco Health Plan
Schoen Consulting
Scripps Health
Sharp HealthCare
Stanford Children's Health
Stanford Health Care
Sutter Health
TeleMed2U
Telemedicine.com, Inc.
The Children's Partnership
The Law Offices of Jeffrey Sinsheimer
University of California, Office of the President
Valley Health Team
West Health
Wildflower Health