



August 13, 2020

The Honorable Richard Neal, Chairman
The Honorable Kevin Brady, Ranking Member
United States House Committee on Ways and Means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady:

The Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) commends the House Committee on Ways and Means for holding its roundtable discussion on, “Examining the Role of Telehealth during COVID-19 and Beyond.’ The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a number of challenges to increased access to telehealth services. These challenges are a significant roadblock to greater health care access, particularly in rural communities.

HLC is a coalition of chief executives from all disciplines within American healthcare. It is the exclusive forum for the nation’s healthcare leaders to jointly develop policies, plans, and programs to achieve their vision of a 21st century healthcare system that makes affordable high-quality care accessible to all Americans. Members of HLC – hospitals, academic health centers, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers, laboratories, biotech firms, health product distributors, post-acute care providers, home care providers, and information technology companies – advocate for measures to increase the quality and efficiency of healthcare through a patient-centered approach.

Increased access to telehealth services has become a health priority during the COVID-19 health pandemic. Healthcare facilities have seen increasing cases of telehealth utilization since the beginning of the COVID-19 health pandemic. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities for example have reported a 1,000% increase in telehealth utilization. HLC members appreciate flexibilities created by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to increase utilization of telehealth services. Rural communities, however, continue to struggle in receiving these services and any discussion of improved telehealth use should ensure that rural communities are not left behind.

The issue of broadband connectivity is one of the most significant challenges for rural communities in obtaining quality telehealth services. Approximately 46 million

Americans live in these areas and struggle to access telehealth services due to broadband inadequacies in their communities. HLC is appreciative of the \$200 million appropriated to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under the CARES Act to improve broadband connectivity and telehealth access for rural areas.

Rural communities also suffer from a shortage of providers and often have to travel miles to receive care. While increased telehealth access has helped to alleviate this burden, existing state licensure requirements prevent providers from offering telehealth services to patients in states they are not currently licensed to practice in, despite offering identical services in other states. Creating greater licensure flexibility for providers will help to further close the provider gap in rural communities and ensure that rural patients receive the care they need.

Improving access to telehealth services for rural areas should be a priority to ensure these vulnerable communities are not left behind. Ensuring that these communities have access to essential health services is a key issue and HLC looks forward to working with the committee on its shared priorities to improve rural access to telehealth services. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Tina Grande at tgrande@hlc.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary R. Grealy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Mary R. Grealy
President