

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 24th, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We are writing regarding your declaration of the public health emergency as a result of the consequences of COVID-19, and subsequent renewal of that declaration in April of this year. Federal departments and agencies, including Health and Human Services, have issued waivers, flexibilities, and guidelines tied to the declaration. Many of these are essential for healthcare providers in rural and underserved areas to continue serving their communities and to stave off site closings and staff layoffs. Because the continued presence and effects of the coronavirus on our health care system, we urge you to renew your declaration before it expires next month.

When COVID-19 started spreading, health centers across the nation rushed into action, building the programs and infrastructure needed to deliver telehealth services to their patients. Working with the administration, health centers were successful in moving forward with telehealth and telephonic care, more than doubling the number of health centers using telehealth or telephonic services¹. Their work and your emergency declaration have brought safety to countless patients who would have had to paradoxically risk their health to receive medical care.

For the duration of the emergency, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has made it much easier to provide services over telehealth to patients using Medicare, Medicaid, or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Importantly, patients can now receive telehealth care in their homes, a crucial step for limiting the spread of the coronavirus. Providers can also deliver telehealth services to new patients who haven't yet had an in-person visit, an important flexibility for patients seeking care for the first time, and bill CMS for video and audio telehealth services as though they were provided in-person².

¹ <https://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Telehealth-FS-2020-BPHC-Final.pdf>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/telehealth/index.html>

Health centers – which serve patients disproportionately affected by chronic health conditions³ – need this renewal to continue care for vulnerable, high-risk populations to prevent them from unnecessary exposure as our communities continue on the path toward reopening. Accordingly, we urge you to renew your declaration of a COVID-19 public health emergency and support health centers’ essential work to provide care to underserved communities.

Sincerely,



Josh Harder
United States Representative (CA-10)



Elise Stefanik
United States Representative (NY-21)

³ <http://www.nachc.org/community-health-centers-lead-in-telehealth-adoption-during-pandemic/>