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The Center Supports Extending Telehealth Services and Hospital at Home Programs

The Center for Health Affairs calls on Congress to extend the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) telehealth flexibilities and hospital at home programs set to expire at the end of March 2025.

Telehealth has revolutionized the way healthcare is delivered, offering a safe, reliable source of high-quality care for tens of millions of people. It has saved patients countless hours and dollars, has reduced the need for costly hospitalizations and transfers, and reduced the burden on clinicians. Patients living in rural and hard-to-reach areas have benefitted immensely as have those with mobility and transportation issues, and other barriers that have hindered access. The flexible telehealth policies put in place following the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) have been a lifesaver for millions of patients – they have increased virtual access to a wider array of clinicians and services, mitigated the clinician shortage, improved access to specialists, and shortened wait times to access care.

Acting now to make telehealth flexibilities permanent will bring much-needed stability to patients and clinicians. The deadline for the end of these policies comes at a time when patients are struggling with economic pressures and clinicians are challenged by burnout and workforce shortages. Medical inflation is outpacing overall inflation, creating cost pressures on both patients and clinicians. In addition, clinician burnout has topped 47% among physicians and 56% among nurses.

The hospital-at-home model — where patients receive acute level care in their homes, rather than in a hospital — has emerged as an innovative and promising approach to provide high quality care to patients in the comfort of their homes. Since the start of the program, Congress has extended the waivers twice. First in 2022 (Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023) for two years and then again in 2024 (H.R. 10545 the American Relief Act) for 90 days. Both extensions received no score from the Congressional Budget Office.

Congressional action is needed to extend the hospital at home waivers, which are now set to expire March 31, 2025. The Center for Health Affairs supports extending the hospital at home waiver for five years. A long-term extension will not only provide additional time to continue gathering data on quality improvement, cost savings, and patient experience, but will also provide much needed stability for new programs.

We strongly urge Congress to permanently adopt telehealth policies and support hospital at home programs to continue providing high-quality, accessible healthcare to patients in Northeast Ohio and across the country.