

Phase 3 Coronavirus Legislation Expands Telehealth to RHCs

******This story is developing and we will update this article as more details become available******

Early this morning, Senate leaders announced a deal on “phase 3” of the COVID-19 legislation, and it includes a key provision expanding the Medicare telehealth services to rural health clinics as the distant site. The legislation now moves to the House for an expedited vote either today or tomorrow.

This victory for rural health clinics comes after weeks of pressure on Congress and the Trump Administration from NARHC and the RHC community. It means that as of the date of enactment, RHCs can confidently provide telehealth visits to Medicare patients and know that they will be paid for those telehealth visits.

However, the details of what the exact telehealth payment will be are still to-be-determined. We do know that the payment for the telehealth visit will not be the all-inclusive rate. Instead, CMS will create a specific payment mechanism for RHCs and FQHCs that is based on the average payments under the physician fee schedule. Keep a close eye on NARHC.org for updates, we will be planning a webinar as soon as those specifics are finalized.

Due to the Coronavirus, CMS and Congress have greatly expanded the Medicare telehealth benefit to allow Medicare beneficiaries to safely seek care through a video-conference style system.

Before this pandemic, telehealth was only available for rural Medicare beneficiaries, and was typically used to get specialty care from specialists in larger towns and cities. Medicare patients still had to physically go to an “originating site” and thus the convenience was limited. Now however, both of these requirements have been eliminated and all Medicare patients can receive a telehealth visit from the comfort of their home.

Congress and the Administration have also waived the requirement that telehealth visits only be with established patients and Medicare is [allowing](#) providers and patients to use popular video chat applications such as Facetime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, or Skype.

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