January 28, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Telehealth has been a critical tool during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that patients continue to receive the health care they need while keeping health care providers and patients safe. Congress recognized the importance of telehealth and included provisions in COVID-19 legislation to increase access to telehealth services for Medicare beneficiaries during the pandemic. We strongly support permanently expanding Medicare coverage of telehealth and removing other barriers to the use of telehealth because of its ability to expand access to care, reduce costs, and improve health outcomes. While Congress prepares to enact permanent telehealth legislation, we urge you to include an extension of the pandemic telehealth authorities in must-pass government funding legislation in February.

An extension to maintain expanded coverage of Medicare telehealth services for a set period of time would provide much-needed certainty to health care providers and patients. Ramping up telehealth requires significant costs and resources from health care providers. However, the pandemic telehealth authorities are temporary and tied to the COVID-19 public health emergency declaration, which is renewed in three-month increments. Without more definitive knowledge about the duration of the pandemic and Medicare’s long-term coverage of telehealth, many organizations have been hesitant to fully invest in telehealth. An extension of the telehealth authorities would provide assurance that the investments will be sustainable over the long term. It would also reassure patients that their care will not end abruptly.

In addition, since the use of telehealth in Medicare was very low before the pandemic, an extension would provide additional time to collect and analyze data on the impacts of telehealth. This data could help inform Congress’s next steps on permanent telehealth legislation and appropriate program integrity and beneficiary protections. In the meantime, it is crucial that an extension not include unnecessary statutory barriers in accessing telehealth services during this data collection and analysis period.
Telehealth has become an essential part of the health care system. The permanent telehealth reforms included in the CONNECT for Health Act, which has bipartisan support from over 170 members of Congress, as well as other telehealth bills, are imperative to increase access to care, reduce costs, and improve health outcomes. In February, Congress should extend the authorities that have expanded coverage of telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to maintain access to telehealth and provide necessary certainty for Medicare telehealth coverage.

We appreciate your collaboration on this important issue.

Sincerely,

[Signatures of senators and representatives]
/s/ Martin Heinrich
MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

AMY KLOBUCAR
United States Senator

JAMES R. LANGEVIN
Member of Congress

CHERI BUSTOS
Member of Congress

DON BACON
Member of Congress

MICHAEL GUEST
Member of Congress