



June 25, 2021

Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of BioOhio and our nearly 300 members that employ over 100,000 Ohioans in the bioscience industry, I write to you today to comment on the April 28, 2021 hearing "Charting The Path Forward For Telehealth." BioOhio is the statewide organization representing the bioscience industry in Ohio, from the state's largest employers to emerging start-ups, schools and universities, research institutions, students, and individuals. Our top priority is bringing medical innovations to patients to save and improve lives while also creating jobs and business growth across the state. In a COVID world and beyond, a key concern for patients is making sure access to healthcare is conveniently available to all Americans via telehealth and that we continue to support and grow telehealth services.

Telehealth is a safe and effective way to provide treatment.

We applaud Congress's swift action to make telehealth available during this public health emergency (PHE). Telehealth allows for mitigation services for healthcare providers to screen for COVID without a patient entering an office where they could potentially put others at risk. It also allows patients who need care but cannot, should not, or will not venture out to a healthcare provider, to get the care they need with minimal to no risk. During a PHE, telehealth services are a critical way to mitigate possible exposures while providing healthcare. Moreover, telehealth services are a safe and effective way to provide treatment to patients at all times, not just during a PHE.

Telehealth allows for the treatment of those with limited access to healthcare services.

Treating patients remotely when an in-person visit would otherwise be necessary - but would expose them to undue risk - has profoundly positively impacted patient health and wellbeing. This is no less true for patients who can minimize risk in this way once the PHE is over. In addition, telehealth can aid in avoiding negative consequences from delayed preventive, chronic, or routine care by maintaining continuity of care to healthcare providers. Extended telehealth services will also lead to increased participation in the health and wellbeing of medically or socially vulnerable patients or who do not have ready access to providers by having this remote option to healthcare services. Additionally, a support system in healthcare is so important. Telehealth services allow a patient's support person to attend visits at times they may be otherwise unable to due to other commitments, their own health issues, geographical location, etc.

Telehealth understanding and innovations have greatly advanced.

Further, the public health emergency has dramatically advanced our understanding of how to provide these remote services, demonstrating the potential to expand access, including more timely communication with patients and the advancement of research through increased access to clinical trials.

Telehealth company Updox, headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, is integrated with more than 100 electronic health records (EHR) and pharmacy management systems and serves more than 560,000 users and 210 million patients. In March of 2021, Updox released a survey of over 1,000 healthcare providers, of which 75% said it's important to have a virtual care strategy moving forward. ([link](#))

An article in the USA TODAY Network discussed the skyrocketing growth in the use of telehealth during the pandemic. "Nationwide Children's Hospital [in Columbus, Ohio], for example, was a few months into a two-to-three-year plan to expand telehealth access across the institution. In March [2020], that plan was immediately fast-tracked to bring providers online for telehealth. Between mid-March and mid-June, more than 100,000 telehealth visits were completed. This rapid expansion was due in a large part to expanded reimbursement for telehealth visits from public and private insurers." ([link](#))

Telehealth policies should be permanently extended

Congress should consider permanently extending the policies that have enabled us to provide remote, high-quality care for our patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes continued support for health care providers and insurance payers to receive payment for telehealth services, as well as the ability for Medicare to reimburse for these services. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued multiple waivers, providing flexibility during the pandemic and granting payment between telehealth and in-person clinical care for Medicare and should continue.

Telehealth is the future of health, giving more Americans the ability to safely access healthcare that may be unavailable to them otherwise for a myriad of reasons. Therefore, we strongly support continued access to telehealth services and continuing to advance this critical healthcare component. Please do not hesitate to contact me personally at jlewis@bioohio.com with any questions.

Sincerely



John F. Lewis, Jr.
President & CEO
BioOhio