

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7444

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to protect access to telehealth services under the Medicare program.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 9, 2026

Mr. PAPPAS (for himself and Mr. NUNN of Iowa) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to protect access to telehealth services under the Medicare program.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Protecting Rural Tele-
5 health Access Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO**
7 **TELEHEALTH SERVICES.**

8 (a) **ELIMINATION OF GEOGRAPHIC REQUIREMENTS**
9 **FOR ORIGINATING SITES.**—Section 1834(m)(4)(C) of the

1 Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(C)) is
2 amended—

3 (1) in clause (i), in the matter preceding sub-
4 clause (I), by striking “clause (iii)” and inserting
5 “clauses (iii) and (iv)”; and

6 (2) by adding at the end the following new
7 clause:

8 “(iv) ELIMINATION OF GEOGRAPHIC
9 REQUIREMENTS FOR ORIGINATING
10 SITES.—The geographic requirements de-
11 scribed in clause (i) shall not apply with
12 respect to telehealth services furnished on
13 or after January 1, 2027.”.

14 (b) ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS IN WHICH
15 TELEHEALTH SERVICES MAY BE FURNISHED IN THE
16 HOME.—Section 1834(m)(4)(C)(ii)(X) of the Social Secu-
17 rity Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(C)(i)(X)) is amended to
18 read as follows:

19 “(X)(aa) For the period begin-
20 ning on the date of the enactment of
21 this subclause and ending on Decem-
22 ber 31, 2026, the home of an indi-
23 vidual but only for purposes of section
24 1881(b)(3)(B) or telehealth services
25 described in paragraph (7).

1 “(bb) For the period beginning
2 on or after January 1, 2027, the
3 home of an individual.”.

4 (c) ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON STORE-AND-
5 FORWARD TECHNOLOGIES.—The second sentence of sec-
6 tion 1834(m)(1) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C.
7 1395m(m)(1)) is amended by striking “in the case of any
8 Federal telemedicine demonstration program conducted in
9 Alaska or Hawaii,”.

10 **SEC. 3. TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILITIES FOR CRITICAL ACCESS**
11 **HOSPITALS.**

12 Section 1834(m) of the Social Security Act (42
13 U.S.C. 1395m(m)) is amended—

14 (1) in the first sentence of paragraph (1), by
15 striking “and (9)” and inserting “(9), and (10)”;

16 (2) in paragraph (2)(A), by striking “paragraph
17 (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8) and (10)”;

18 (3) in paragraph (4)—

19 (A) in subparagraph (A), by striking
20 “paragraph (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8)
21 and (10)”; and

22 (B) in subparagraph (F)(i), by striking
23 “paragraph (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8)
24 and (10)”; and

1 (4) by adding at the end the following new
2 paragraph:

3 “(10) TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILITIES FOR CRIT-
4 ICAL ACCESS HOSPITALS.—

5 “(A) IN GENERAL.—On or after the date
6 of the enactment of this paragraph—

7 “(i) the Secretary shall pay for tele-
8 health services that are furnished via a
9 telecommunications system by a critical ac-
10 cess hospital, including any practitioner
11 authorized to provide such services within
12 the facility, that is a qualified provider (as
13 defined in subparagraph (B)) to an eligible
14 telehealth individual enrolled under this
15 part notwithstanding that the critical ac-
16 cess hospital providing the telehealth serv-
17 ice is not at the same location as the bene-
18 ficiary, if such services complement a plan
19 of care that includes in-person care at
20 some point, as may be appropriate;

21 “(ii) the amount of payment to a crit-
22 ical access hospital that serves as a distant
23 site for such a telehealth service shall be
24 determined under subparagraph (C); and

25 “(iii) for purposes of this subsection—

1 “(I) the term ‘distant site’ in-
2 cludes a critical access hospital that
3 furnishes a telehealth service to an eli-
4 gible telehealth individual; and

5 “(II) the term ‘telehealth serv-
6 ices’ includes behavioral health serv-
7 ices and any other outpatient critical
8 access hospital service that is fur-
9 nished using telehealth to the extent
10 that payment codes corresponding to
11 services identified by the Secretary
12 under clause (i) or (ii) of paragraph
13 (4)(F) are listed on the corresponding
14 claim for such critical access hospital
15 service.

16 “(B) DEFINITION OF QUALIFIED PRO-
17 VIDER.—For purposes of this subsection, the
18 term ‘qualified provider’ means, with respect to
19 a telehealth service described in subparagraph
20 (A)(i) that is furnished to an eligible telehealth
21 individual, a critical access hospital that has an
22 established patient relationship with such indi-
23 vidual as defined by the State in which the indi-
24 vidual is located.

“(C) PAYMENT.—The amount of payment to a critical access hospital that serves as a distant site that furnishes a telehealth service to an eligible telehealth individual under this paragraph shall be equal to 101 percent of the reasonable costs of the hospital in providing such services, unless the hospital makes an election under paragraph (2) of section 1834(g) to be paid for such services based on the methodology described in such paragraph. Telehealth services furnished by a critical access hospital shall be counted for purposes of determining the provider productivity rate of the critical access hospital for purposes of payment under such section.

“(D) IMPLEMENTATION.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may implement this paragraph through program instruction, interim final rule, or otherwise.”.

SEC. 4. EXTENDING MEDICARE TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILITIES FOR FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS AND RURAL HEALTH CLINICS.

Section 1834(m)(8) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(8)), as amended by section 4113(c) of

1 division FF of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023
2 (Public Law 117–328), is amended—

3 (1) in subparagraph (A), in the matter pre-
4 ceding clause (i), by inserting “, and on or after
5 January 1, 2027” after “December 31, 2024”;

6 (2) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting
7 the following:

8 “(B) PAYMENT.—

9 “(i) IN GENERAL.—A telehealth serv-
10 ice furnished by a Federally qualified
11 health center or a rural health clinic to an
12 eligible telehealth individual pursuant to
13 this paragraph or after the date of the en-
14 actment of this subparagraph shall be re-
15 imbursed under this title at a separate
16 telehealth payment rate as determined
17 under the methodology established by the
18 Secretary pursuant to clause (ii).

19 “(ii) PAYMENT METHODOLOGY.—The
20 Secretary shall establish a methodology for
21 determining the appropriate payment rate
22 for telehealth services described in clause
23 (i). Such methodology shall consider—

1 “(I) the geography of Federally
2 qualified health centers and rural
3 health clinics;

4 “(II) costs associated with the
5 delivery of such telehealth services as
6 allowable costs for the center or clinic;
7 and

8 “(III) the full cost of providing
9 the services via telehealth.

10 “(iii) IMPLEMENTATION.—

11 “(I) CODING SYSTEM.—The Sec-
12 retary shall establish an effective cod-
13 ing system for telehealth services de-
14 scribed in clause (i) that is reflective
15 of the services provided at a center or
16 clinic.

17 “(II) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not-
18 withstanding any other provision of
19 law, the Secretary may implement this
20 subparagraph through program in-
21 struction, interim final rule, or other-
22 wise.”; and

23 (3) by adding at the end the following new sub-
24 paragraph:

1 “(C) REQUIREMENT DURING ADDITIONAL
2 PERIOD.—

3 “(i) IN GENERAL.—Beginning on Jan-
4 uary 1, 2027, payment may only be made
5 under this paragraph for a telehealth serv-
6 ice described in subparagraph (A)(i) that
7 is furnished to an eligible telehealth indi-
8 vidual if such service is furnished by a
9 qualified provider (as defined in clause
10 (ii)).

11 “(ii) DEFINITION OF QUALIFIED PRO-
12 VIDER.—For purposes of this subpara-
13 graph, the term ‘qualified provider’ means,
14 with respect to a telehealth service de-
15 scribed in subparagraph (A)(i) that is fur-
16 nished to an eligible telehealth individual, a
17 Federally qualified health center or rural
18 health clinic that has an established pa-
19 tient relationship with such individual as
20 defined by the State in which the indi-
21 vidual is located.”.

1 **SEC. 5. ALLOWANCE OF CERTAIN TELEHEALTH SERVICES**
2 **FURNISHED USING AUDIO-ONLY TECH-**
3 **NOLOGY.**

4 Section 1834(m)(4) of the Social Security Act (42
5 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)) is amended by adding at the end
6 the following new subparagraph:

7 “(G) TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM.—

8 “(i) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding
9 paragraph (1) and section 410.78(a)(3) of
10 title 42, Code of Federal Regulations (or
11 any successor regulation), subject to clause
12 (v), on or after January 1, 2027, the term
13 ‘telecommunications system’ includes, in
14 the case of the furnishing of a specified
15 telehealth service (as defined in clause (ii))
16 a communications system that uses audio-
17 only technology.

18 “(ii) SPECIFIED TELEHEALTH SERV-
19 ICE.—In this subparagraph, the term
20 ‘specified telehealth service’ means a tele-
21 health service described in clause (iii) that
22 is furnished by a qualified provider (as de-
23 fined in clause (iv)).

24 “(iii) TELEHEALTH SERVICE DE-
25 SCRIBED.—Subject to clause (vi), a tele-

1 health service described in this clause is a
2 telehealth service consisting of—

3 “(I) evaluation and management
4 services;

5 “(II) behavioral health counseling
6 and educational services; and

7 “(III) other services determined
8 appropriate by the Secretary.

9 “(iv) QUALIFIED PROVIDER DE-
10 FINED.—For purposes of clause (ii), the
11 term ‘qualified provider’ means, with re-
12 spect to a specified telehealth service that
13 is furnished to an eligible telehealth indi-
14 vidual—

15 “(I) a physician or practitioner
16 who has an established patient rela-
17 tionship with such individual as de-
18 fined by the State in which the indi-
19 vidual is located; or

20 “(II) a critical access hospital (as
21 defined in section 1861(mm)(1)), a
22 rural health clinic (as defined in sec-
23 tion 1861(aa)(2)), a Federally quali-
24 fied health center (as defined in sec-
25 tion 1861(aa)(4)), a hospital (as de-

1 fined in section 1861(e)), a hospital-
2 based or critical access hospital-based
3 renal dialysis center (including sat-
4 ellites), a skilled nursing facility (as
5 defined in section 1819(a)), a commu-
6 nity mental health center (as defined
7 in section 1861(ff)(3)(B)), or a rural
8 emergency hospital (as defined in sec-
9 tion 1861(kkk)(2)).

10 “(v) AUTHORITY.—For purposes of
11 this subparagraph, the Secretary may de-
12 termine whether it is clinically appropriate
13 to furnish a specified telehealth service via
14 a communications system that uses audio-
15 only technology and whether an in-person
16 initial visit (in addition to any requirement
17 with respect to the furnishing of an item
18 or service in person pursuant to clause
19 (iv)(I)) is required prior to the furnishing
20 of such service using such technology.

21 “(vi) REVIEW.—

22 “(I) IN GENERAL.—Not later
23 than 5 years after the date of the en-
24 actment of this subparagraph, the
25 Secretary shall conduct a review of

1 the furnishing of specified telehealth
2 services through audio-only technology
3 pursuant to this paragraph. Such re-
4 view shall include an analysis of the
5 impact of the roll out of broadband
6 technology and whether the use of
7 audio-only technology is necessary to
8 ensure access to such telehealth serv-
9 ices.

10 “(II) REDETERMINATION OF
11 SPECIFIED TELEHEALTH SERVICES.—

12 The Secretary may, based on the re-
13 view conducted under subclause (I),
14 provide for the addition or deletion of
15 services (and HCPCS codes), as ap-
16 propriate, to those specified in clause
17 (ii) that may be furnished using
18 audio-only technology and authorized
19 for payment pursuant to this subpara-
20 graph.

21 “(vii) CLARIFICATION REGARDING
22 PAYMENT.—The amount of payment for a
23 specified telehealth service that is fur-
24 nished using audio-only technology shall be
25 equal to the amount that would have been

1 paid for such service under this subsection
2 had such service been furnished via any
3 other telecommunications system author-
4 ized under this subsection.”.

5 **SEC. 6. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING EXPANSION OF**
6 **ELIGIBLE PRACTITIONERS THAT MAY FUR-**
7 **NISH TELEHEALTH SERVICES.**

8 It is the sense of Congress that the expansion of eligi-
9 ble practitioners that may furnish telehealth services (as
10 defined in section 1834(m)(4)(F) of the Social Security
11 Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(F))) during the emergency
12 period described in section 1135(g)(1)(B) of such Act (42
13 U.S.C. 1320b–5(g)(1)(B)) should be extended on a perma-
14 nent basis.

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