



February 1, 2016

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

The Alliance of Community Health Plans (ACHP) enthusiastically offers our support for the “**CONNECT for Health Act.**” We appreciate that you have recognized the importance of telehealth-enabled services in providing health care to all patient groups, including Medicare beneficiaries, and look forward to working with you to secure passage of legislation this year.

ACHP is a national leadership organization representing community-based and regional health issuers and provider organizations. ACHP’s member health plans provide coverage and care for more than 18 million Americans. Our members are not-for-profit health plans or subsidiaries of not-for-profit health systems; most cover substantial numbers of Medicare Advantage (MA) enrollees. Eight of the twelve 5-star rated MA plans are offered by ACHP members, including the Kaiser Permanente Hawaii region. Our member plans share longstanding commitments to their communities, close partnerships with providers, and substantial investments in the innovative approaches and infrastructure necessary to provide health care that is coordinated, affordable and high quality.

ACHP members and many other health plans increasingly utilize remote access technologies to provide clinical care and strengthen coordination of services across settings; these efforts are enhanced by our members’ use of the electronic medical record. Health plans are using electronic visits, video technology, and remote monitoring to provide maintenance and preventive care for their enrollees, as well as diagnosis and treatment when it is clinically appropriate. Our members find very high enrollee satisfaction with this approach and no degradation in the quality of care; in fact, remote technologies provide the opportunity for improvements in the quality of care because they increase the amount of interaction between the patient and health care team and the information available on the patient’s health status.

The **CONNECT for Health Act** reflects ACHP’s belief that Medicare should treat remote access technologies as an alternative modality or complementary means of providing clinical services, and not a service itself. As you have recognized in the bill, *telehealth is a different way of delivering an already covered service*, whether that is a physician visit or preventive service. In other words, telehealth should not be seen as simply a supplement or complement to face-to-face encounters. Patients increasingly expect their health plans to provide the access to services and convenience that remote technologies facilitate. State Medicaid programs have recognized the advantages of telehealth-based services,

MAKING HEALTH CARE BETTER

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The Honorable Brian Schatz
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providing at least some level of reimbursement (depending on the state), particularly for real-time interactive video visits. Many states also require commercial health plans to provide reimbursement for services provided via telehealth, although not necessarily at parity with services provided in person.

Dramatic changes in the use of visits via email and video link, clinical advice lines, remote consultation by specialists, electronic medical records, monitoring devices, and other aspects of telehealth hold the promise of improving access to and timeliness of needed care. These technologies can increase communication between providers and patients, enhance care coordination, and help physicians and patients work together to treat illness and maintaining health.

The **CONNECT for Health Act** will provide statutory authority for Medicare to play a leading role in promoting innovative clinical approaches using remote access technologies. If enacted, your bill will have a substantial impact on the entire delivery system.

Sincerely,



Ceci Connolly
President and CEO
Alliance of Community Health Plans