

The Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act: H.R. 2903/S. 1512

Summary

The CONNECT for Health Act will expand coverage of telehealth services through Medicare, make permanent COVID-19 telehealth flexibilities, improve health outcomes and make it easier for patients to safely connect with their doctors.

Telehealth allows for those seeking health-related services and information to connect with their doctors virtually. COVID-19 relief legislation temporarily expanded access to telehealth during the pandemic. As a result, telehealth has seen a sharp rise in use as people seek to avoid travelling to hospitals and other healthcare settings and instead receive care at home. The CONNECT for Health Act will remove all geographic restrictions on telehealth services, expand originating sites to include the home and other sites, allow health centers and rural health clinics to provide telehealth services and allow for the waiver of telehealth restrictions during public health emergencies.

Rationale

ALS is a progressive nervous system disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, causing loss of muscle control. ALS patients lose their ability to use their arms, use their legs, to speak, to eat, and ultimately will rob them of their ability to breathe. This loss of mobility makes it difficult for people living with ALS to get to their medical appointments. Having to go to appointments away from their home puts an undue burden on them and their caretakers. In addition, ALS clinics and medical providers who specialize in ALS are not common. People living with ALS thus have to travel long distances, even for short medical appointments. ALS is an expensive disease. CONNECT for ALS would relieve the financial costs associated with travelling to medical appointments. It also would allow people living with ALS to choose their medical provider not based on their location, but their expertise.

Waiving telehealth restrictions during a public health emergency also is important to those living with ALS as they are more susceptible to severe adverse effects from an illness due to their lack of muscle control and reduced lung capacity.

Contact to Support

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI), meghan_o'toole@schatz.senate.gov

Sen. Roger F. Wicker (R-MS), kirby_miller@wicker.senate.gov

Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ), chad.michaels@mail.house.gov

Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA), Crozer.Connor@mail.house.gov

Bill Components

- + Waives telehealth requirements through Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretarial authority — This would allow the HHS Secretary to waive certain requirements related to payment for telehealth services, provided that quality of care would not be adversely impacted. These waivers would need to be reassessed at least every three years to ensure the quality of care remains undiminished.
- + Waives telehealth requirements during public health emergencies.
- + Provides \$3 million for audit, investigation and other oversight activity relative to telehealth services.
- + Mandates the HHS Secretary to make available educational resources and training sessions of telehealth service requirements for beneficiaries and providers.
- + Removes all geographic restrictions on telehealth services permanently and expands originating sites to include the home and other sites;
- + Allows health centers and rural health clinics to provide telehealth services, a provision temporarily put in place due to the pandemic;
- + Allows for the waiver of telehealth restrictions during public health emergencies; and
- + Requires a study to learn more about how telehealth has been used during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

About ALS

ALS is a disease that attacks cells in the body that control movement. It makes the brain stop talking to the muscles, causing increased paralysis over time. Ultimately, people with ALS become prisoners within their own bodies: unable to eat, talk, breathe or move on their own. Their mind, however, often remains sharp so they are aware of what's happening to them. ALS will affect 1 in 300 people in our lifetimes, and people with ALS usually have no more than 2-5 years to live following diagnosis.