

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 4, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We write today to encourage the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide coverage of comprehensive telehealth services, including voice communication, for beneficiaries of the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).

Telehealth has been an important resource for our constituents during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has helped ensure that patients are able to access care without exposing themselves or their providers to the risk of COVID-19 infection. This is in part due to Congressional and administrative action. Many patients that are covered by Medicaid, Medicare or private insurance are now able to receive a greater variety of telehealth services in their own homes, through different platforms, for the duration of the public health emergency due to COVID-19. Our nation's veterans are also increasingly utilizing telehealth services. This year, VA has seen a 1,000 percent increase in the number of telehealth video appointments conducted each day.

Benefits available to CHAMPVA beneficiaries are not the same as those available to veterans through VA. Section 17.272(a)(46) of Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, allows CHAMPVA to cover synchronous telehealth services, defined as the use of real-time, interactive video conferencing, to assess, treat, and provide care to a patient remotely. Our understanding is that these regulations do not allow CHAMPVA to cover sessions that involve voice communication only, including audio-only conferencing, telephone calls, and text messaging.

Our constituents, including those who reside in rural areas where internet access may be limited, need access to telehealth services that involve voice communication, especially during a public health emergency. We appreciate the steps VA has taken in recent years to make telehealth more accessible to veterans and their families, but in order for this access to be meaningful, it must reach constituents through the platforms that work best for them and their providers. As such, we urge VA to take the necessary steps to immediately ensure CHAMPVA beneficiaries are able to access health services through voice communication platforms.

We look forward to working with you to ensure continued progress on this issue.



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Patrick Leahy

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator