

HHS Announces Historic Expansion of Telehealth Access to Combat COVID-19

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HHS announced unprecedented steps to expand Americans' access to telehealth services during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded Medicare coverage for telehealth visits, the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced it will waive potential HIPAA penalties for good faith use of telehealth during the emergency, and the HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) provided flexibility for healthcare providers to reduce or waive beneficiary cost-sharing for telehealth visits paid by federal healthcare programs.

HHS Secretary Alex Azar released the following statement:

“Thanks to the Public Health Emergency I declared in January, more older Americans will be able to access healthcare they need from their home, without worrying about putting themselves or others at risk during the COVID-19 outbreak. Providers will be allowed to use everyday technologies to talk to telehealth patients, more telehealth services will be covered for millions more Medicare beneficiaries, and providers will be allowed to offer these telehealth benefits to Medicare beneficiaries at a lower cost than traditional services. From the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, President Trump has been knocking out every bureaucratic obstacle possible that stands in the way of a rapid and effective response. We are grateful to the hard work of those across HHS who put together these actions, and we're grateful to American healthcare providers for working to take advantage of these options and continue their heroic work serving patients during the outbreak.”

See CMS's press release: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/president-trump-expands-telehealth-benefits-medicare-beneficiaries-during-covid-19-outbreak>

See OCR's guidance: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/notification-enforcement-discretion-telehealth/index.html>

See OIG's policy statement: <https://oig.hhs.gov/compliance/alerts/index.asp>