



Healthcare Horizons: Telehealth Triumph and Policy Imperatives

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- Telehealth has become a lifeline to communities that are often underserved.
- Expanding Medicaid coverage makes healthcare more accessible to everyone.
- Solving state licensing challenges is key to unlocking the full potential of telehealth.

What is the issue?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth became very popular. As it grew in popularity, it showed how it can help people get the care they need. As healthcare moved online, telehealth became very important for people in underserved areas and those who needed more help.

Stopping programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a big problem. ACP made internet access cheaper for households. New enrollments stopped on February 7, 2024, and now families will struggle to get services. Without ACP funding, the digital divide continues to grow.

This shows the need for programs that help everyone get access to important services.

Why is this important?

Telehealth is a key tool for improving healthcare access. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs works to ensure access to telehealth through programs. One program is the Digital Divide Consult. This program refers an individual to a social worker who helps patients get internet services or technology. An additional program is the Digital Equity Act. This gives \$2.75 billion to create three grant programs.

These programs want to ensure that everyone has the skills, technology, and ability to use the internet. Both programs help people get the technology they need making it more accessible.

A 2021 study showed that telehealth made a big difference for people in Medical Assistance (MA) programs. Most people (65%) said telehealth helped them get medical care they couldn't have gotten otherwise. They preferred telehealth for future care because it saved them travel time, money, and made it easier to manage childcare or eldercare. This shows that telehealth helps remove barriers to healthcare. It offers a convenient and effective alternative to in-person visits.

What should policymakers do?

1. Establish grant programs specifically for the use of telehealth services.
2. Address interstate licensure compacts to maximize telehealth's reach across states.
3. Leverage federal programs like the Digital Equity Act to support telehealth resources.

SOURCES

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