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Trump Administration Announces New Actions Improving Access to Healthcare across America

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On Monday, August 3, President Trump signed executive orders with the goal of improving healthcare in rural America, for seniors, and for all Americans, by expanding telehealth, modernizing regulations, and reforming payments.

Specifically, the executive orders call on HHS to:

- Propose a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) rule to extend parts of Medicare's broader coverage of telehealth beyond the end of the current public health emergency.
- Propose a payment model to improve rural healthcare through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation.
- Launch a rural health action plan with a range of actions that different components of HHS will take to 1) build sustainable models for rural communities, 2) focus on preventing disease and mortality, 3) leverage innovation and technology, and 4) increase access to care.
- Reach a memorandum of understanding with the Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Agriculture to promote rural access to telehealth via broadband.

"President Trump is delivering on his promise of an affordable, patient-centered healthcare system for all Americans," said HHS Secretary Alex Azar. "Telehealth use has skyrocketed during the pandemic thanks to the President's actions, and the telehealth revolution is here to stay. The new gold standard for healthcare will be patients and providers deciding on the right blend of in-person and virtual care, when and where it makes sense for them. The President is now directing HHS to keep charging ahead on giving Americans better access to the doctors of their choice, including via telehealth. The President's executive order on rural health will help transform care for forgotten Americans who deserve better healthcare and better access to their doctors."

"The extension of telehealth flexibilities initiated by today's executive order inaugurates a new era of healthcare delivery," said CMS Administrator Seema Verma. "At President Trump's direction, CMS has dramatically expanded the availability of telehealth during the pandemic, extending a lifeline to patients and providers amid stay-at-home orders. In an earlier age, doctors commonly made house calls. Given how effectively and efficiently the healthcare system has adapted to the advent of telehealth, it's become increasingly clear that it is poised to resurrect that tradition in modern form. Thanks to President Trump, the telehealth genie is not going back into the bottle."

The Trump Administration has put a focus on expansions of telehealth, including to support rural areas, before the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the crisis. Starting in 2019, Medicare began paying for virtual check-ins, meaning patients across the country can briefly connect with doctors by phone or video chat to see whether they need to come in for a visit.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CMS moved swiftly to significantly expand payment for telehealth services and implement other flexibilities so that Medicare beneficiaries living in all areas of the country can get convenient and high-quality care from the comfort of their home while avoiding unnecessary exposure to the virus. Before the public health emergency, only 14,000 beneficiaries received virtual services through Medicare each week; by the last week of April, that number had jumped to almost 1.7 million.