



# Congress Should Pass the Mental Health Telemedicine Expansion Act, H.R. 1301

introduced by Reps. Suzan DelBene (D-WA) and Tom Reed (R-NY)

The Mental Health Telemedicine Expansion Act would make it easier for older adults to obtain mental health care in their own home by removing current-law restrictions on the use of telehealth services. A growing population of older adults are suffering from depression, anxiety disorders and related conditions, and are at risk for suicide and addiction.

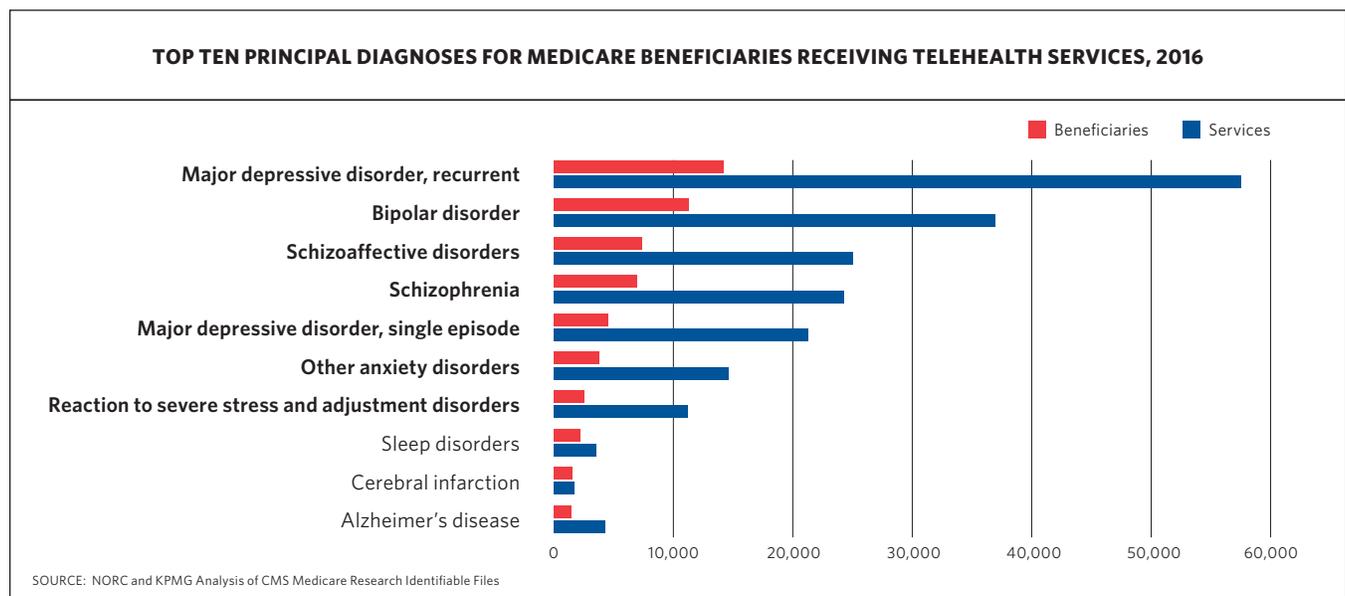
The legislation expands the delivery of Medicare telehealth services to a patient’s home and removes restrictions on geographic service area to **improve access to mental health care services for the growing population of older adults, who are suffering from depression, chronic pain, and are at risk for suicide and addiction.**

Specifically, the legislation would allow Medicare beneficiaries access to key psychotherapy services through telehealth:

- no matter where they live, rather than only those who live in rural or specific geographic areas with health provider shortages;
- in their own homes, instead of only clinical settings such as a doctor’s office, hospital or community mental health center.

Through the bill, psychologists and other mental health providers will be allowed to deliver psychotherapy (CPT 90834 and 90837) through real-time, interactive audio and video telecommunications with a patient. An initial, in-person assessment of the needs of the patient will continue to be required prior to the provision of telehealth services.

**The seven most common diagnoses for Medicare beneficiaries receiving telehealth services are all behavioral in nature.**



“While Medicare current law limits coverage to when the services are furnished to beneficiaries located in originating sites located in rural areas ... there is emerging evidence that telehealth can also help address problems of access to care in urban areas.... As with rural areas, urban telehealth has the potential to encourage access to care before medical issues become critical, reduce inappropriate use of emergency departments, and improve management of chronic conditions.”

(Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (2018). *Information on Medicare Telehealth*. p. 16)

### **Why Does Congress Need to Enact the Mental Health Telemedicine Expansion Act?**

According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the restrictions prohibiting receipt of services in the home and limiting coverage to specific geographic areas are the two greatest barriers that may prevent greater expansion of telehealth services. H.R. 1301 would eliminate these barriers to help:

- **Those who have depression.** Depression can have an alarming effect on an older adult’s physical health condition and is associated with increased functional impairments and higher mortality. Older adults with depression have almost double the health care costs compared to those without depression, primarily because of the presence of comorbid physical health conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders in older adults. **Evidence-based psychotherapy services can help older adults with depression** enhance their mental and emotional well-being, regain a sense of control over their life, and recover. Their family caregivers can learn beneficial ways to support them and effectively cope.

- **Those who are suicidal.** Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Social isolation and depression are among the risk factors that often trigger thoughts of suicide in **older adults, who have the highest rate of suicide of any age group.**
- **Those with chronic pain.** Chronic pain is one of the most prevalent symptoms among older adults, affecting this population more than any other age group. It is best treated from a multidisciplinary approach as it encompasses biological, psychological and emotional factors. **Psychological treatments are an important part of successful pain management.**
- **Those at risk of addiction.** Unaddressed mental health issues frequently contribute to, and complicate, addictive behaviors. As an example, patients with chronic non-cancer pain and comorbid depression are more likely than those without depression to receive opioids, use them for longer periods of time, and misuse or abuse them. By 2020 it is estimated 5 million older adults will have substance use problems.

**The legislation builds upon recent telehealth reforms enacted by Congress to combat the nation’s opioid crisis** for Medicare patients with substance use or a co-occurring mental health disorder, by extending telehealth coverage to older adults in need of mental health treatment who may also be at risk of having a co-occurring mental health or substance use disorder.

**By enacting the bipartisan Mental Health Telemedicine Expansion Act, Congress will narrow the gap on the growing number of older adults with unmet mental health needs and help improve health outcomes.**