

Rep. Loudenbeck & Sen. Kooyenga: Introduce Telehealth legislation

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Madison - Rep. Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton), Sen. Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) along with Rep. Deb Kolste (D-Janesville) and Sen. Janet Bewley (D-Mason) recently unveiled legislation to improve access to telehealth health services for Medicaid recipients.

“Telehealth is increasingly being utilized to improve access to essential care, but state laws are not keeping pace with advances in technology. Medicaid recipients and providers are currently unable to leverage telehealth’s true potential and we want to change that.” said Rep. Loudenbeck. “Wisconsin health care providers are eager to offer more telehealth services but under Medicaid’s current policies that’s not allowed.”“

The Wisconsin Hospital Association defines telehealth as the delivery of health care services remotely by means of telecommunications technology. It can help to improve access to health care services by allowing patients to receive care locally in their communities by connecting to providers in other locations. Common examples of telehealth include virtual office visits, telestroke services, remote patient monitoring, and remote evaluation of patient information.[1]

“A growing body of evidence suggests that you can expand access to telehealth without increasing costs. This is because telehealth is not adding a new type of health care service; rather, it is a different way to access health care services that are already available,” said Sen. Kooyenga.

The legislation has four main goals to improve Medicaid coverage of telehealth:

1. Require Medicaid to treat telehealth the same as in-person services in terms of coverage for patients and reimbursement for providers.
 2. Help Medicaid catch up to Medicare in the number of telehealth services it covers. There are currently more than 50 separate telehealth services Medicare covers that Medicaid does not.
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1. Allow Medicaid patients to receive telehealth directly in their homes or other non-clinical settings.
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1. Repeal the added layer of telehealth certification that has been a barrier to expanding access to behavioral health and substance use services for Medicaid patients.

The bill is currently being circulated for co-sponsorship and will be formally introduced at the end of the month.