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Multi-Stakeholder Coalition Applauds Trump Administration for Expansion of Telehealth Benefits to Support Socially Isolated and Lonely Medicare Beneficiaries During COVID-19 Crisis

Washington, DC – Today, the Trump Administration announced the temporary and emergency expansion of Medicare telehealth coverage that will enable beneficiaries to receive a wider range of health care services without having to travel to their health care provider’s office during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness, a diverse set of national organizations including consumer groups, health plans, health care providers, technology innovators, patient advocates and more, applauds the expansion of benefits to allow for increased access to physical, mental, and behavioral telehealth resources to aid those suffering from social isolation and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, more than 8 million Americans experience social isolation, and nearly half of older adults feel isolated, alone, or left out. Research conducted at Brigham Young University shows that social isolation and loneliness are associated with a 29 percent and 26 percent increased risk of mortality, respectively, comparable to that of obesity and cigarette smoking. In addition to negative health effects, it is estimated that Medicare spends \$6.7 billion annually as a result of individuals being socially isolated.

As a result of COVID-19, individuals are at greater risk for social isolation and loneliness as we all move toward appropriately practicing [social distancing](#) to avoid the spread of the virus.

As part of the expansion announced today, beneficiaries can now receive telehealth services from a range of healthcare providers, such as doctors, nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, and licensed clinical social workers from their homes and [without](#) a previously “established relationship” with the provider. Telehealth services are also available through various methods of communication such as telephones, video technology, and other applications widely available on smart phones. With the increased spread of COVID-19, the absences of these flexibilities posed significant barriers for beneficiaries suffering from chronic social isolation and loneliness to access the physical, mental, and behavioral health care they need.

In addition, with social distancing causing new cases of social isolation and loneliness among beneficiaries, it is difficult for those without an “established relationship” to receive necessary telehealth care. ***The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness applauds these expansions to create greater access to care for those suffering from social isolation and loneliness in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.***

“The Administration’s efforts today to increase access to critical physical and behavioral health services via well-established modes of communication will have a very real and timely impact on those impacted by the coronavirus” said Edward Garcia, Co-Director of the Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness. **“As our friends, families, and neighbors across the country are confronted with new fears and anxieties - while finding themselves forced into isolation – the ability for more Americans to access behavioral health supports, virtually, is the right response at the right time. We applaud the Administration for this action and urge them to consider long-term expansion of these policies to more Medicare beneficiaries.”**

The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness brings together a diverse set of national organizations including consumer groups, health plans, health care providers, technology innovators, patient advocates and more to develop and advocate for federal policy solutions to address the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness. For more information, please visit: www.endsocialisolation.org, our COVID-19 Resource Center at www.endsocialisolation.org/COVID-19 and [@EndSocialIsolation](https://twitter.com/EndSocialIsolation) on Twitter.

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