



SUPPORT

Senate Bill 402 – Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee February 13, 2020

Nurx is a healthcare company that facilitates access to high-quality medical services from licensed healthcare providers via telemedicine, and makes available related pharmacy and lab testing services. We operate in over 20 states, and have helped hundreds of thousands of patients address sexual health needs, including birth control, emergency contraception, and PrEP for HIV prevention. Nurx was the first telehealth company to offer patients a seamless end-to-end PrEP treatment, from remote consultation with a medical provider to at-home lab testing to delivery of medication straight to the patients' door.

Nurx supports Senate Bill 402, which outlines straightforward requirements and patient safety protections to permit licensed healthcare practitioners to deliver care through telehealth. SB 402 is a significant step forward for Maryland in that it recognizes that licensed providers should be permitted to choose the telehealth tools and technologies – just as a provider would in an in-person setting – that are best-suited to the patient and the medical issue presented.

For example, studies have shown PrEP – which is up to 99 percent effective at preventing HIV infection – is heavily underutilized for many reasons, including lack of awareness, access, and particularly stigma associated with use. In our experience, robust asynchronous telehealth interactions (online exam, secure messaging) can address these barriers by offering PrEP in a discrete and convenient way:

- **Breaks down stigma:** With stigmatized and sensitive issues like PrEP, some patients can be embarrassed or have too much anxiety to talk to their provider face-to-face. Asynchronous interactions can facilitate an honest exchange of information between the patient and provider that can exceed that elicited during traditional in-person exams.
- **Meets patients where they are:** Allows patients the convenience of initiating care and sharing at times of their choosing, rather than having to schedule a time to meet a provider or arrange for private space to have a video interaction.
- **Access to expert providers:** It can be difficult for patients to find a medical provider that knows about PrEP or is willing to prescribe it. Telehealth connects patients to knowledgeable providers and the opportunity to engage in ongoing discussions.

Current regulations from the Board of Physicians unnecessarily restrict access to care by mandating that physicians and physician assistants delivering care through telehealth must use synchronous video interactions for any new patient. While a video interaction might be appropriate for certain patients or medical issues, it is not always medically necessary and can serve as a barrier to care.

In Maryland, there are over 30,000 people living with HIV, and in 2017, there were over 1,000 new HIV diagnoses in the state. The clear framework in this bill will give providers like Nurx the assurance to serve patients in Maryland, and in the process, expand patients' access safe and affordable critical health services like PrEP. We ask the Committee to vote favorably on this bill.