



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

MARYLAND BOARD OF PHARMACY

Jennifer L. Hardesty, PharmD, FASCP, Board President — Deena Speights-Napata, MA, Executive Director

February 22, 2023

The Honorable Melony Griffith
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Senate Bill 534 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023

Dear Chairwoman Griffith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Board of Pharmacy (Board) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 534 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023.

SB 534 would extend the inclusion of “an audio-only telephone conversation between a health care provider and a patient that results in the delivery of a billable, covered health care service” in the definition of “telehealth” from the current expiration date of June 30, 2023 to June 30, 2025. § 15-141.2(a)(7)(ii)(2). SB 534 would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to reimburse a health care provider for the diagnosis, consultation, and treatment of a program recipient for a health care service that can be appropriately provided through telehealth, including an audio-only telephone conversation until June 30, 2025, on the same basis and the same rate as if the health care service were delivered by the health care provider in person. § 15-141.2(g)(3)(i). SB 534 would require insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations that provide hospital, medical, or surgical benefits to individuals or groups on an expense-incurred basis under health insurance policies or contracts that are issued or delivered in Maryland to reimburse a health care provider for the diagnosis, consultation, and treatment of an insured patient for a health care service covered under a health insurance policy or contract that can be appropriately provided through telehealth, including “an audio-only telephone conversation until June 30, 2025,” on the same basis and the same rate as if the health care service were delivered by the health care provider in person. § 15-139(d)(2)(i).

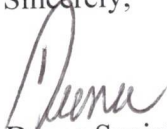
The Board supports the inclusion of audio-only telephonic communications in the definition of “telehealth,” and extension of reimbursement for care delivered via the modality until June 30, 2023.

Should the extension of coverage be solely a time-limited response to the continued impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Board encourages the General Assembly to consider making the measures permanent. “Telepharmacy, and pharmacist reimbursement for those services, was increasing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic due to an increase in the elderly population, “rise in diagnoses, volume of chronic illnesses, shortage of medical personnel—especially in underserved ZIP codes and rural areas—and the use of and access to better and less expensive technology.”¹ Resources leveraged during the pandemic may, if authorized by the General Assembly, continue to provide increased access to clinical pharmaceutical services for segments of the population who experience difficulty attending in-person appointments. An audio-only telephone conversation is an additional method of communication for individuals who may not have access to internet at their place of residence or find telephone conversations more efficient. Additionally, an audio-only conversation may serve as an initial point-of-contact which helps a pharmacist determine whether a patient requires a higher level of care than can be provided remotely. “[R]eimbursement for telephone visits, particularly to those for whom video visits are impossible, will incentivize the use of this critical modality when it is needed.”²

The Board respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 534.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Deena Speights-Napata, MA, Executive Director at deena.speights-napata@maryland.gov or (410) 764-4753.

Sincerely,



Deena Speights-Napata, MA
Executive Director

¹ Haydon-Greatting, Starlin. “The era of telehealth pharmacy practice.” *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association* vol. 62,1 (2022): 12–13. doi:10.1016/j.japh.2021.11.027

² Ameri, Arefeh et al. “Tele-pharmacy: A new opportunity for consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic.” *Health policy and technology* vol. 9,3 (2020): 281-282. doi:10.1016/j.hlpt.2020.06.00