

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 869 - Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 13, 2025**



Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports HB 869, which would remove the sunset limitation on the expanded access to telehealth that has existed since the public health emergency during the pandemic and continuing with the passage of the Preserve Telehealth Health Access Act of 2021.

Telehealth has immensely increased access to care for people experiencing homelessness. While this increased access occurred during the public health emergency, the benefits are so concrete that we strongly believe increasing access to telehealth permanently is critical. Make no mistake: the ability to provide phone-only services to our clients is lifesaving. While we support the bill in its entirety, we would like to focus our testimony on one of the most vital aspects of the bill: maintaining access to audio-only services.

Contrary to prior belief, telehealth, particularly audio-only telehealth, works well for people experiencing homelessness. With the benefit of having had a number of years of access to telehealth, we have found that with our clients, phones are ubiquitous and inexpensive. Conversely, high speed internet access and video screens are exceedingly inaccessible. Allowing patients to receive services via audio-only telephones can make up for the lack of broadband access in many parts of the State and the lack of affordable internet and computer technology among lower-income families.

According to Health Care for the Homeless Chief Medical Officer, Laura Garcia, CRNP:

Food insecurity, lack of reliable transportation, unemployment, no childcare, and concern about personal safety, results in many competing priorities and ultimately barriers to accessing care. This only underscores the importance of a flexible and inclusive approach to healthcare. My patients often do not have access to the internet or data services through their mobile phones, but they are able to maintain phone services. By offering audio-only telehealth services, we can provide care that accommodates these challenging circumstances. This approach not only helps address immediate health needs but also builds trust and continuity of care within these vulnerable communities.

In other words, phone-only telehealth is the only type of telehealth accessible to the vast majority of our clients. If the ability to conduct phone-only visits goes away, so will our ability to provide the full level of lifesaving telehealth care to many of our clients.

We urge a favorable report on House Bill 869.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 11,000 Marylanders annually at centers in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.