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LD 323 – An Act Regarding Insurance Coverage for Telehealth Services

LD 649 – An Act to Expand and Promote Telehealth Services

Greetings, Senator Sanborn and Representative Tepler, and members of the Joint Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services.

My name is Bridget Quinn and I am the Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine. AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. On behalf of our more than 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today to highlight the importance of supporting family caregivers.

Today I am submitting testimony in support of LD 323 and LD 649.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more Americans are turning to telehealth appointments to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19 when connecting with medical professionals. Government data showed that in just one week in April, nearly 1.7 million Medicare beneficiaries received telehealth services, compared with 13,000 in a typical week before the pandemic.¹ Between mid-March to mid-June 2020, more than 9 million Medicare enrollees received telehealth services.²

Telehealth can be a useful tool for medical providers during and beyond a public health emergency. Utilizing telehealth can help family caregivers who may be juggling a number of important responsibilities, saving them time. Telemedicine has also proved helpful in helping a patient manage a chronic condition.³

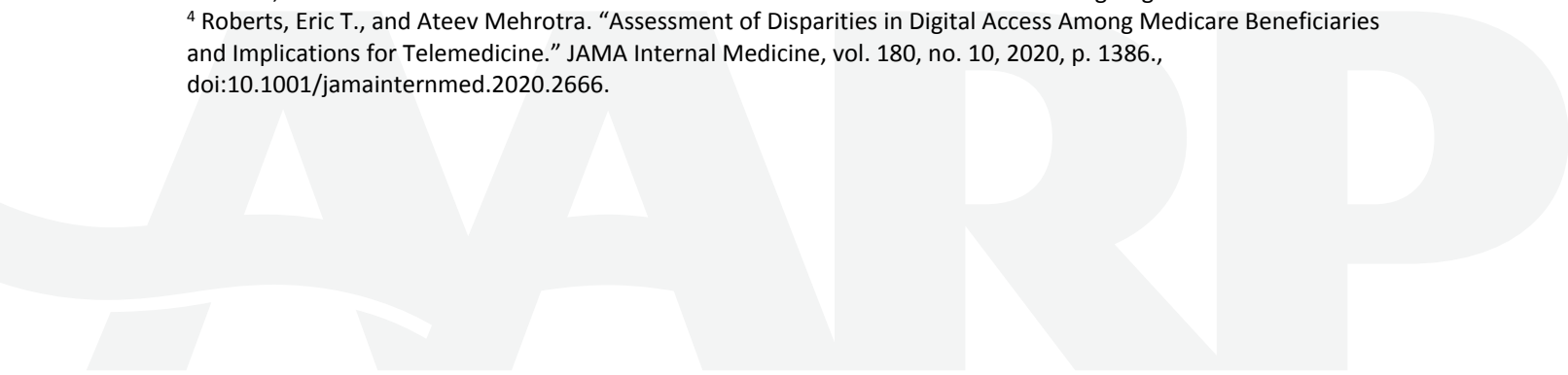
However, there are barriers to older Mainers trying to access telehealth services. According to a 2020 report, more than 26 percent of Medicare beneficiaries lack digital access at home.⁴ Lack of access to high-speed internet is a familiar issue to many Mainers. LD 323 and LD 649 will begin

¹ Marsa, Linda. The Future of Telehealth and What It Means for Older Adults. AARP.org August 2020.

² Marsa, Linda. The Future of Telehealth and What It Means for Older Adults. AARP.org August 2020.

³ Marsa, Linda. The Future of Telehealth and What It Means for Older Adults. AARP.org August 2020.

⁴ Roberts, Eric T., and Ateev Mehrotra. "Assessment of Disparities in Digital Access Among Medicare Beneficiaries and Implications for Telemedicine." JAMA Internal Medicine, vol. 180, no. 10, 2020, p. 1386., doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2020.2666.



to address this issue by requiring health insurance carriers to cover telehealth services that are provided through telephone communication only. While we believe that all Mainers should have access to affordable high-speed internet, in part so they can access the newest telehealth technologies, these bills will serve to advance access to important telehealth options.

Further, LD 649 seeks to allow health professionals licensed or certified in other states to practice their professions across state lines through telehealth. Since the start of the pandemic, more and more patients are facing high wait times and delays when trying to make needed in-person appointments to see their physician. Allowing more out-of-state licensed practitioners to offer telehealth services in Maine expands provider availability for in-person services.

Now is an excellent time to take action to increase access to telehealth services for Mainers. An AARP study from June 2020 shows that awareness of telehealth services is rising for healthcare consumers.⁵ Those polled are also ready to use telehealth. Among participants in the poll, roughly two-thirds of respondents who are interested in telehealth services, said they would use telehealth;

- To renew prescriptions (85%)
- For help in caregiving (79%)
- To discuss a new medical issue (76%)
- For a routine visit to the doctor (74%)⁶

Services provided by telehealth have great potential to help consumers more easily connect with various health care clinicians, maintain their quality of life, and remain in their communities longer by providing an opportunity to better manage their care.

I respectfully ask you to support LD 323 and LD 649. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. If you have any questions or need further information, please don't hesitate to contact me: bquinn@aarp.org or 207-272-8563.

Thank you,
Bridget Quinn
AARP Maine

⁵ Keenan, Teresa A. *Views on Telehealth*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, June 2020. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00388.001>

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