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WHA Hails Final Passage of Telehealth Improvement Bill

WHA-Supported Bill Gains Still More Bipartisan Support, Heads to Governor's Desk

The Wisconsin Hospital Association hailed today's State Assembly bipartisan approval of WHA-supported legislation that will enhance availability of innovative telehealth services to Wisconsin patients. Today's unanimous action by the Assembly is the capstone to one of the most widely-supported bills of the 2019-20 biennium, with 67 cosponsors from both houses and unanimous votes in all committee actions and floor votes.

"Telehealth is one of the most rapidly-growing areas of health care, and we sincerely thank the Assembly for today's approval," said Eric Borgerding, WHA president and CEO. "The bipartisan recognition that enhancing telehealth services can allow more patients in both rural and urban settings to access our state's high-quality health care in a cost-effective way is the kind of forward thinking all of Wisconsin can appreciate."

Numerous studies, including Wisconsin's own state employee health insurance program, have determined that creating access to care through telehealth is a cost-effective strategy for the state's Medicaid program. The legislation is the culmination of three years of work by WHA's Telemedicine Work Group, and includes provisions implementing the work group's four recommendations for the state's Medicaid program:

- Cover telehealth the same as in-person care when the quality of the care provided is functionally equivalent.
- Catch up to Medicare in the number of telehealth-related services that are covered.
- Cover in-home or community telehealth services.
- Increase access to behavioral health via telehealth.

The legislation's authors are State Assembly Reps. Amy Loudonbeck (R-Clinton) and Deb Kolste (D-Janesville) and State Senators Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) and Janet Bewley (D-Mason).

Referencing other action today, Borgerding also thanked the Assembly for ensuring Wisconsin will continue to participate in the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (IMLC), which allows physicians to apply for multiple state medical licenses without having to resubmit the same basic application information each time. The Assembly's approval follows the Senate's unanimous nod in June.

"The compact has proven to be a useful option that can make Wisconsin's medical licensing process more efficient, so the Legislature's decision to support the compact is a helpful move," Borgerding said. "Still, we understand some applications are enduring long processing delays, which means delays in physicians being able to treat patients in Wisconsin. We need to ensure that administrative processes don't interfere with patient care." Borgerding thanked Reps. Nancy VanderMeer (R-Tomah) and Kolste and Sens. Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point) and Patty Schachtner (D-Somerset) for authoring the compact bill.