

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
October 6-7, 2021
Indianapolis, Indiana**

Resolution No. 19: Improving Telehealth Access

Origin: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Submitted by: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

WHEREAS, The *VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018* authorized federally credentialed or licensed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health professionals to provide veterans treatment across state lines if received at another VA federal facility; and

WHEREAS, By 2020, VA had over 50 different health-care specialties that could be delivered via telehealth and through the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020*, VA received an influx of \$2.2 billion to quickly upgrade IT infrastructures to meet telework demands during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, By January 2021, VA telehealth appointments exponentially increased by 1,831%, necessitating the migration of existing VA Video Connect (VVC) platform to the cloud in support of VA's average 100,000-to-120,000 remote daily users; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic created lingering and permanent disruptions, necessitating VA to provide permanent virtual telehealth platforms for its homelessness, substance use disorder, military sexual trauma counseling, rural suicide prevention, and other behavioral support programs; and

WHEREAS, While the CARES Act prioritized telehealth for veterans with low-incomes, living in underserved areas, or those residing in rural areas; and veterans with lower income, higher disability, and more chronic conditions were more likely to use virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic; it was discovered that older veterans aged 45 and older, homeless veterans, or rural veterans were less likely to conduct video visits, raising the concerns of existing access barriers; and

WHEREAS, Certain veteran populations, such as native veterans living on tribal lands, were more disproportionately affected by the digital gap; as only 53% of these residents have access to broadband; and

WHEREAS, According to the American Telemedicine Association to address health disparities, policy makers must support robust investment in telehealth infrastructure, including broadband, to ensure universal access to telehealth benefits for all communities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular assembled meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 6-7, 2021, That The American Legion urges Congress to permanently allow Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health professionals, in resident trainees, interns, and contracted out health providers to practice telemedicine across state lines if qualified to practice within the scope of their authorized federal duties regardless of where the covered health professional or patient is located; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to fully fund and provide robust oversight of research, procurement, expansion, sustainment, and training of remote telehealth platforms in all health-care disciplines to ensure the safeguarding of personal health information and the agile adaption and streamlining of emergent technologies; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges VA to continue to close the digital gap by addressing digital broadband access barriers and digital literacy issues prevalent in certain veteran populations; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to continue supporting modernization grants and programs which expand telehealth services and supports to vulnerable veteran populations or veterans living in underserved communities.