

The Holt Company

Tom Holt

May 22, 2020

Members of the House Health Committee:

On behalf of Zoom+Care, thank you for dedicating time during your hearing today to hear about COVID-19's impact on telemedical care.

Zoom+Care operates nearly 50 on-demand primary and emergency-physician care clinics in Oregon and Washington, along the I-5 corridor between Salem and Seattle. Like other providers, in recent weeks Zoom+Care has experienced significant telehealth uptake by patients, and it's been an excellent way to both provide routine care as well as screen people who think they may have COVID-19 before they present at a clinic. Fortunately, Zoom+Care built robust telemedicine capabilities into its practices well before COVID-19.

We appreciate the work Commissioner Stolfi and his team have done to expand access to telemedicine in Oregon, in the absence of a state telemedicine payment parity law.

From a provider perspective, health insurers' implementation of this expansion has been mixed, although we recognize the challenges everyone had in changing policies and configuring claims systems on the fly. Several carriers implemented true payment parity, notably Regence, but some have not changed their policies at all. Similarly, some very large self-insured employers have directed their plan administrators to implement payment parity, but that is not the norm; self-insured plans are federally regulated.

In Washington state, a payment parity bill fortuitously passed the Legislature in its regular Session just as COVID-19 broke loose. Gov. Inslee used his emergency powers to waive what would have been a Jan. 1, 2021, implementation to make it take effect immediately. Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, who is an elected official with his own emergency powers, directed carriers to expand telehealth coverage, most notably to include telephone and video chat tools. With no runway, initial implementation understandably was a little rough, but within a very short time, with significant involvement of Commissioner Kreidler's staff, problems were corrected and has since been going relatively smoothly, now only a month or so into it.

Some future tweaks will be needed to the new Washington law, but it serves as an excellent starting point for Oregon 2021 discussions. Most major Oregon health insurance carriers also are active in the Washington market.

We recommend that this committee convene an interim workgroup on telemedicine, with a charge to report back on "lessons learned" from its COVID-driven and recommended policy actions.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Holt
For Zoom+Care