



Virginia Garcia Memorial
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Memorandum

To: Chair Prusak, Vice-Chair Salinas, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the House Committee on Health Care

From: Gil Muñoz, CEO
Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center

Date: February 3, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2508

On behalf of Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, we write to voice our strong support of House Bill 2508 that will increase coverage and reimbursement by Oregon Medicaid and commercial payers of health services delivered using telemedicine.

Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center provides high quality, culturally appropriate health care to more than 52,000 patients every year that live and work in Washington and Yamhill counties. For more than 45 years, we have offered primary, dental, and behavioral and mental health services. We work every day to address and remove the barriers that prevent our patients from receiving the care they need.

COVID-19 fundamentally changed the way we deliver care to vulnerable individuals in our community. The implementation and rapid expansion of telemedicine at our clinics during the pandemic benefited our patients in many ways.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw telehealth peak at 86% of visits in April 2020. Even as we began returning to in-person care, telehealth remained at close to 50% of our visits due to both social distancing requirements and in some cases, patient preference. For many patients overall care has improved, as they are more comfortable with phone visits and are more likely to keep their appointments. We have seen a drop of 5% or more in missed appointments or no-shows since implementing our telehealth program. Patients with chronic and acute conditions are seeking care more often and are getting the care they need in a clinic/low-cost setting rather than accessing emergency room/higher-cost care.

Today, we provide the same or better access to primary and behavioral health care, saving transportation costs and unnecessary emergency visits. The COVID-19 positivity rate in our population has consistently been at least 3 times higher than the Oregon average. By providing telemedicine services to our patients, we are able to safely assess their condition and determine if they need to be seen in person or whether a higher level of care is needed, without endangering their health or the health of our staff or other patients.

Enhanced telehealth reimbursement will also allow us to continue to reimagine our care delivery model for our patients - many of whom are front-line workers and are unable to leave work for an in-person visit, but can conduct a telehealth visit during a break at their workplace.

Under the traditional reimbursement model, we would need to revert to the traditional model of nursing triage, scheduling directly with Providers in clinic, and requiring patients to come to the clinic to receive care, when they can just as easily be assessed via telemedicine.

As we roll out COVID-19 vaccinations, and improve on our ability to conduct video visits, telehealth will also allow greater flexibility in providing follow-up care and assessment of potential vaccine reactions.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2508. We believe that expanding telehealth to all Oregonians is the next step in transforming health care in Oregon, and we respectfully urge you to vote yes on this