

Two-year telehealth extension set for Ways and Means markup

By Ben Leonard

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The House Ways and Means Committee is set to mark up a two-year extension of Medicare telehealth rules that have allowed for more reimbursement of virtual care since Congress endorsed them during the pandemic, according to seven lobbyists familiar with the plans.

“There is momentum for a two-year extension. It’s become apparent that a shorter-term extension would not address provider concerns about uncertainty, which ultimately impacts patient access,” said one of the lobbyists granted anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

A spokesperson for the committee didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment, and it’s not clear what bill the panel will vote on.

The pending [CONNECT for Health Act](#) by Ways and Means member [Mike Thompson](#) (D-Calif.) and [Telehealth Modernization Act](#) by Rep. [Buddy Carter](#) (R-Ga.) would make the pandemic-era rules permanent.

The [Ways and Means](#), [Senate Finance](#) and [House Energy and Commerce committees](#) have all held hearings on telehealth this Congress.

Why it matters: The Medicare rules are set to expire at the end of the year. This would be the first major telehealth markup this Congress. Although telehealth advocates would likely support an extension, many have pushed for the rules to be made permanent.

The rules allow older Americans to have telehealth visits from their home rather than having to drive to a clinic, which is particularly burdensome in rural areas.

Key questions remain, including how much to pay for virtual care as compared to in-person care and whether telehealth access increases Medicare spending.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have generally supported expanding access to telehealth in Medicare, but have raised concerns about cost. The Congressional Budget Office’s cost score of an extension will likely be a key factor for lawmakers whenever it comes.

Before the pandemic, Medicare only covered telehealth in certain rural areas and required patients to travel to eligible health care facilities to access telehealth services.

What’s next: Approval by Ways and Means would be an important step en route to a floor vote.