



December 10, 2019

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
U.S. Senate  
722 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
U.S. Senate  
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin  
U.S. Senate  
509 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Thune  
U.S. Senate  
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner  
U.S. Senate  
703 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith  
U.S. Senate  
702 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

To Senators Schatz, Wicker, Cardin, Thune, Warner and Hyde-Smith:

On behalf of the American Academy of Dermatology Association (Academy), which represents close to 14,000 dermatologists nationwide, I write to support your introduction of S. 2741, the Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effect Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act of 2019. As leaders in telehealth, the Academy supports this step forward in modernizing the Department of Health and Human Services' approach to increase patient access to care.

Dermatologists diagnose and treat more than 3,000 diseases, including skin cancer, infections, psoriasis, immunologic diseases and many genetic disorders.<sup>1</sup> One in four Americans suffers or will suffer from a skin disease. As dermatologists at the forefront of the fight against skin cancer and treating numerous skin diseases, the Academy has made patient access to dermatologic care a top priority.

As part of the CONNECT for Health Act, the Academy applauds your efforts to provide care to people in areas with workforce shortages and for patients who live far from health care providers

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<sup>1</sup> The Academy's *Burden of Skin Disease* briefs are a set of informational resources that capture the scope and importance of various skin conditions, and can be accessed at <https://www.aad.org/about/burden-of-skin-disease/burden-of-skin-disease-briefs>.

and facilities. Waiving existing restrictions for payment for telehealth services will allow dermatologists to improve patient access.

We support the legislation giving the Secretary the *option* to waive coverage restrictions if it is deemed that it would not deny or limit the coverage or provision of benefits. The Academy believes telehealth is a viable option to deliver high-quality care to patients in certain circumstances. The Academy supports the preservation of a patient choice to have access to in-person dermatology services and teledermatology services from a dermatologist of the patient's choosing. There are some skin diagnoses for which an in-person examination by a dermatologist provides additional information that may not otherwise be obtainable by teledermatology alone. Therefore, it is important to ensure that by expanding access to telehealth services that payers, including, but not limited to, traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage, do not create unintended barriers to quality care by limiting in-person interactions between the patient and physician.

Furthermore, removing geographic barriers at Federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics and Indian Health Services will promote our physician-members' efforts to provide critical dermatologic services to underserved patient populations. Dermatologists have championed several teledermatology initiatives in order to increase access to Board-certified dermatological care. The *AccessDerm* program provides teledermatology as a means of improving access to the expertise of board-certified dermatologists while providing high-quality, high-value care at no charge to eligible under-served clinical sites. Teledermatology through *AccessDerm* has facilitated patient care coordination and communication between primary care providers and dermatologists through secure provider-to-provider consults with an easy-to-use platform.

The Academy supports the appropriate use of telehealth as a means of improving access to the expertise of Board-certified dermatologists to provide high-quality, high-value care.<sup>2</sup> In order to have appropriate coverage and payment for telehealth services, physicians delivering teledermatology services must be licensed in the State in which the patient receives services and must abide by that State's licensure, scope of practice and medical practice laws. Provision of teledermatology should have proper documentation, including collection and coordination of the patient's medical records and history. Organizations and clinicians participating in telehealth should have active training, protocols for local referrals for urgent and emergency care and protect patient privacy. Technical training is also necessary at the originating sites to ensure high-quality video and photography.

The Academy appreciates your leadership on these issues, is pleased to offer our support for S. 2741 and looks forward to working with you to address increasing access to physician care. If you

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<sup>2</sup> <https://server.aad.org/Forms/Policies/Uploads/PS/PS-Teledermatology.pdf>.

have any questions or comments, please contact Blake McDonald, the Academy's Manager, Congressional Policy, at [bmcdonald@aad.org](mailto:bmcdonald@aad.org) or 202-712-2608.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Hruza". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "G".

George Hruza, MD, MBA, FAAD  
President  
American Academy of Dermatology Association