

March 31, 2021

Dear legislators,

The undersigned groups represent people living with chronic and rare conditions, and we are united in our support for ESHB 1196, the audio-only telemedicine bill. The CDC estimates that more than 6 in 10 Americans have at least one chronic disease, meaning a significant portion of your constituents could have a chronic disease.<sup>i</sup> Expanding access to telemedicine has long been a priority for the patient advocacy community as telemedicine reduces many long-standing barriers to quality health care. Thus, we are pleased that the legislature is considering mandated insurance coverage for audio-only telemedicine.

Telemedicine addresses many issues that do not otherwise have easy or cheap solutions, such as limited transportation, a shortage of specialists, and underserved rural areas. A silver lining in the pandemic has been the widespread adoption of telemedicine – allowing patients access to their medical providers without leaving their homes. However, we have also seen disparities widen during the pandemic as many individuals without high-speed internet or expensive tablets and smartphones have been denied the benefits of telemedicine.

ESHB 1196 aims to fix that problem by requiring coverage of audio-only telemedicine. Simple conversations with a medical provider are incredibly important for people with a chronic disease, whether it is addressing a new symptom, discussing the progress of ongoing treatment, or understanding test results. These conversations can happen sooner (and cheaper) if audio-only telemedicine becomes widespread. Insurance coverage for audio-only telemedicine is a simple solution that will have a significant impact.

We are pleased that the legislature is considering making permanent many of the temporary pandemic-related changes to improve access to health care, including telemedicine. Please support ESHB 1196 and improve access to audio-only telemedicine for your constituents.

Sincerely,

Arthritis Foundation  
American Diabetes Association  
Bleeding Disorder Foundation of Washington  
Born a Hero  
Center for Chronic Illness  
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society  
NAMI Washington  
National MS Society  
Northwest Parkinson's Foundation  
Washington #insulin4all

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/index.htm>