



## **Testimony in Support House Bill 6472: An Act Concerning Telehealth**

**Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut  
February 23, 2021**

Chairs and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 6472: An Act Concerning Telehealth.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut envisions a health system that is accountable and responsive to the people it serves, that supports our health, takes excellent care of all of us when we are sick at a cost that doesn't threaten our financial security and continues to be an important source of quality employment and vitality in our communities.

One of our policy priorities during this pandemic is to ensure access to coverage and care during this time. We are testifying in support of this telehealth proposal because it has become a critical point of access to the health care system for many, as well as this proposal has implications for improving health equity.

Amid this pandemic, telehealth has proven to be an important part of the health care delivery system, as many people want to avoid going out in public, to the doctor or may have transportation challenges. Telehealth has helped many retain access to the health care system, even as this pandemic goes on, as well as helped providers continue to deliver care and bring in revenue. We applaud the legislature for taking up this important aspect of access to care for Medicaid members. As Black and brown communities are disproportionately Medicaid beneficiaries, addressing this issue also tackles an aspect of health equity.

We support including telephone only (audio only) telehealth for Medicaid beneficiaries. Access to both the internet and a device able to conduct telehealth visits via video may be a challenge for many during this pandemic, including and especially low-income people or those struggling with recent job loss. A telephone may be the only reliable form of communication some people have to conduct telehealth visits. Again, this is an issue of health equity, not only access to care.

It should be noted, though, that even telephone only (audio only) telehealth is not necessarily accessible to all – some people may have limitations on the minutes of their phone and be unable to use their phone for this purpose. It is important to retain the ability to see a doctor in person, as telehealth may not be the best way to access health care for everyone.

We are happy to see that payment parity for telehealth is included in the bill language. It is important that providers be compensated for telehealth visits as they would for an in-person visit. Many of the elements of a visit remain the same via telehealth, except the mode of communication. Medicaid should not reduce the reimbursement amount to providers just because a visit was conducted via telehealth.

One suggestion for this proposal would be to include tele-dental services along with other telehealth services. Dental care is so often left out of consideration of health care, yet we know it is a crucial aspect of physical and mental health. While dental providers may be limited in the services they can provide in a telehealth environment, there is still value in those services.

While the provisions in this bill will only be in place until June 30, 2023, as a state we need to consider how to handle telehealth in the future, as telehealth has shown itself to be a critical point of access for many patients, whether there is a pandemic or not.

We applaud this legislation for considering permanency for telehealth, especially audio-only telehealth, in Medicaid. We would suggest that this policy be made permanent, but barring that, a study into making telehealth permanent in Medicaid would give us the important information we need to make an educated decision to keep telehealth benefits for Medicaid members.

Thank you for your time.

*Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable, equitable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.*