

March 22, 2022

**TO:** Chairwoman Pickett, Chairman DeLuca, and Honorable Members of the House Insurance Committee

**FROM:** Heather Tyler, Vice President, State Legislative Advocacy

**SUBJECT:** Support for House Bill 2419, Behavioral Telehealth Services

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On behalf of more than 240 members statewide, The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) expresses its strong support for House Bill 2419, sponsored by Representative Tina Pickett. As you know, it has been assigned to the House Insurance Committee.

Pennsylvania's shortage of mental health providers was a concern even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Without enough qualified professionals and with limited ways to access treatment, patients were forced to wait long periods before beginning treatment. Pennsylvania's 2018 Outpatient Psychiatric Oversight Act was a much-needed step to normalize the use of telehealth as a way for Pennsylvanians to connect with important mental health care. And, of course, Pennsylvania's COVID-era waiver that explicitly authorizes telehealth remains in place, but it is temporary and set to expire soon.

As more and more Pennsylvanians seek treatment for anxiety, depression, substance use disorder, and other mental health concerns, telehealth has quite literally become a lifeline. Telehealth has increased the reach of existing providers, allowing patients to be seen by high-quality professionals who may not otherwise have been available due to geographic, transportation, or other logistical barriers.

In fact, nationally, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Epic Research have recently found that "telehealth visits for outpatient mental health and substance use services went from virtually zero percent in 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to a peak of 40 percent in mid-2020—and continued to account for more than a third (36%) of such visits in the six months ending in August 2021."

House Bill 2419 offers a permanent step toward addressing a dual crisis—limited access to behavioral health services and Pennsylvania's health care workforce shortage. First, the legislation increases access to care by authorizing telehealth for behavioral health services. Additionally, the legislation modernizes psychiatric supervisory time requirements, extending providers. It is a much-needed step that will have positive long-term effects on the health and well-being of all Pennsylvanians.

**On behalf of Pennsylvania hospitals, their behavioral health professionals, and the patients they serve, we respectfully ask that you please consider House Bill 2419 in committee and vote yes.**