



# ACT FOR OLDER ADULTS

## COVID-19 Relief: Medicare Home Health

### *Expand home health emergency telehealth authority to allow for payment*

It is critical that home health agencies (HHAs) be able to count telehealth visits as part of a unit of service especially since we anticipate serving patients released from the hospital or sheltering at home with COVID-19. We ask that Congress amend section 1895(e) of the Social Security Act to allow telehealth visits to count as part of the payment system so long as telehealth visits are included in the plan of care for the duration of the public health emergency.

Congress and CMS are allowing and even encouraging HHAs to maximize telehealth during this crisis. HHAs cannot count telehealth encounters as in-person visits for payment purposes, and at the same time HHAs face compounded strains because of new documentation requirements, lower referrals, and overall adjustment to a new payment model. Most of the members of the home health team – physicians, advance practice nurses, physician assistants, and therapists – can now bill Part B for telehealth services at the equivalent rate as an in-person visit but the agencies cannot. This puts HHAs in the untenable position of forfeiting adequate reimbursement to better protect their staff and patients (an ethical choice many HHAs are already making) in an environment in which their future viability is in question. Without this adjustment, the flexibility intended by the Congress in expanding telehealth flexibility for HHAs may not be fully realized, the industry may face widespread financial insolvency, and patients may not be able to access essential services.

### *Allow verbal orders for home health services for the duration of the emergency*

Professionals who can order home health must sign written orders and certify in writing that patients are eligible for home care in order for home health agencies to bill for services. In the current environment, physicians, advanced nurse practitioners, and physician assistants are increasingly unavailable to sign home care documents, making even electronic signatures extremely difficult to obtain. Having the flexibility to rely on documented verbal orders and eligibility certifications would expedite safe discharges and referrals to home care.

### **Ask Your Members of Congress to:**

- Amend section 1895(e) of the Social Security Act to allow telehealth visits to count as part of the payment system for the duration of the public health emergency.
- Authorize verbal orders and eligibility certifications for the duration of the emergency by passing [H.R. 7006](#).