

ARIZONA  
TELEMEDICINE  
PROGRAM



# Legal & Regulatory Considerations for Telehealth

(in the time of COVID-19)

Nancy S. Rowe

*Associate Director, Public Policy & Outreach*

*Arizona Telemedicine Program*

# Disclosures

I am not an attorney.

I don't even play  
one on TV.

Consult an attorney.

Compliance Department



**"I'll be honest ... there are books by James Joyce that are easier to follow than these bad boys."**





**Everything has  
changed.**

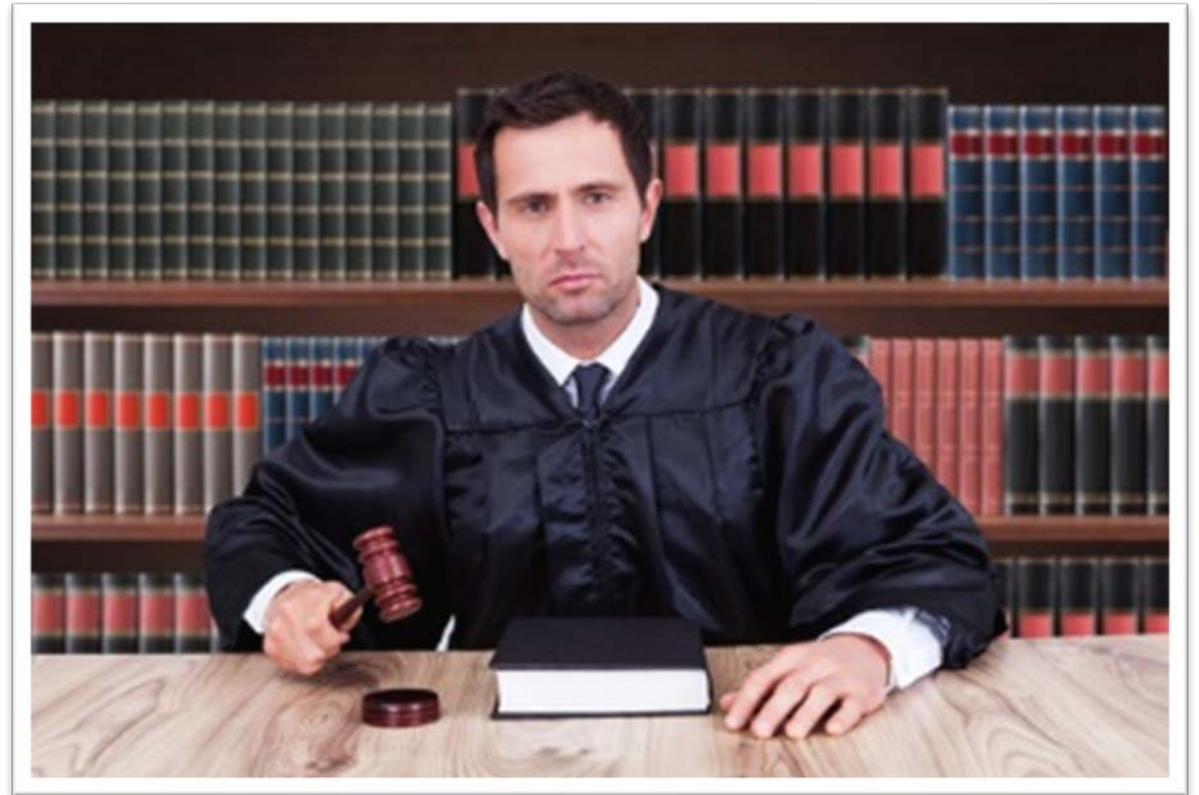
**At least for now.**



# Telemedicine Law

- Healthcare laws & regulations still apply\* regardless of whether the healthcare service takes place in person or via telehealth:
  - Licensing
  - Prescribing
  - Anti-kickback/Stark
  - Other fraud & abuse laws
  - Liability
  - Standard of care
  - HIPAA & HITECH
  - Corporate Practice of Medicine

*\*Unless waived or loosened during the national healthcare emergency*



# Informed Consent

- 40 jurisdictions include some sort of informed consent requirements in statutes, administrative code, and/or Medicaid policies
- Basics:
  - Pt rights, including right to stop or refuse tx via telemed
  - Pt responsibilities
  - Formal complaint/grievance process
  - Potential benefits, constraints, risks
  - Inform what will happen in case tech fails during session, state contingency plan



# Medical Malpractice & Telemedicine

- Telemed coverage may not be included in standard medical malpractice policies: **ask your insurer about TM & coverage in other states**
- Mitigate risk with strong provider credentialing practices & **training specific to telemedicine delivery**
- Adopt same quality assurance & peer review practices as with in-person
- Act within scope of licensure
- **Follow pt.-state laws** & regs, federal law, clinical guidelines



# Provider Location – Did You Know?

- Medicare: Distant Site Provider must **(still)** be physically located within US

## OIG Report: CMS Paid Practitioners for Telehealth Services That Did Not Meet Medicare Requirements

13 April 2018 | Health Care Law Today | Blog

Authors: Nathaniel M. Lacktman



- **1 claim** was for services provided by a physician located outside the United States (A physician residing and practicing psychiatry in Pakistan provided psychiatric counseling services through telehealth technology to a patient located at a rural medical center in the United States. The service was unallowable because the physician was located outside the United States.).





# Congress & Telehealth

- It literally takes an Act of Congress to change Medicare telehealth coverage restrictions – SSA
- Baby steps, chipping away at restrictions ...
- **Until now! CARES Act let HHS Sec. waive Medicare restrictions & other requirements**

## CARES Act Expands Telehealth Coverage for Medicare, FQHCs and the VA

The Coronavirus relief bill passed by Congress and signed by President Trump last week expands Medicare coverage for telehealth, allows FQHCs and RHCs to qualify for coverage and boosts funding for broadband services.



Source: ThinkStock



By Eric Wicklund





# Licensure: Evolving

- Telemedicine provider must be licensed in pt. state ... or ...
- Interstate licensure compacts:
  - Interstate Medical Licensure Compact (2016)
  - Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (2018)
  - PSYPACT (Psychology) (2016)
  - Physical Therapy Compact (2016)
  - REPLICA: Interstate EMS Compact
  - Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (in progress)



# Licensure Special Cases

- Peer-to-peer consultations
- Provider licensure in home state?
- Universal licensure (AZ)
- Federal programs (VA, IHS, tribal)
- Seeing your own established pt. in another state where you are not licensed? (WA says yes)
- Licensure waivers for COVID-19
  - Medicare
  - States/Medicaid

## Senators Eye Telehealth Licensure Freedom During COVID-19 Emergency

A bill introduced this week would allow healthcare providers in good standing to use telehealth to treat patients in any state during the coronavirus pandemic.



Source: ThinkStock



By Eric Wicklund



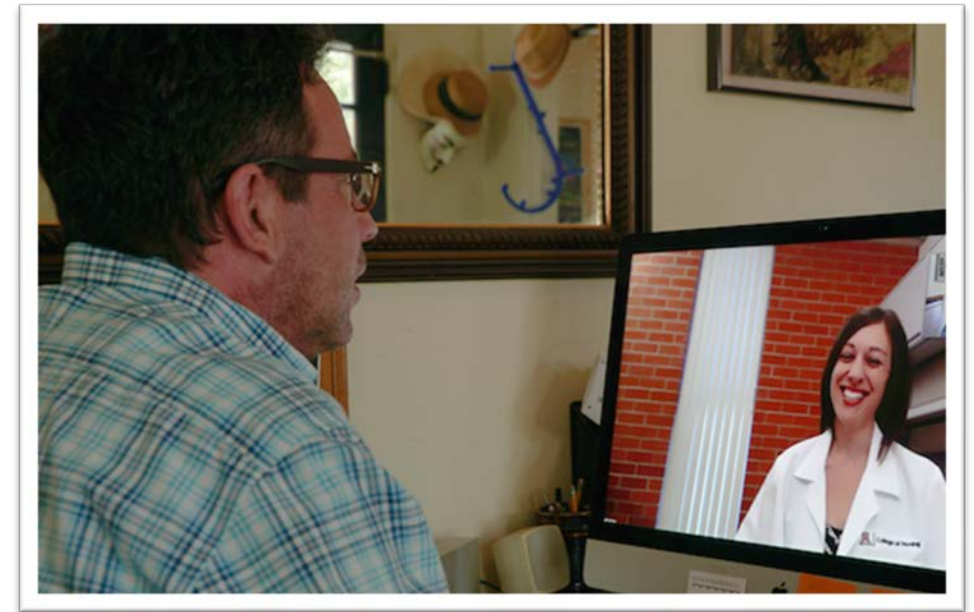
August 05, 2020 - A new bill before Congress takes aim at one of the bigger barriers to telehealth expansion: interstate licensure.

Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) this week unveiled the **Temporary Reciprocity to Ensure Access to Treatment (TREAT) Act**, which would enable healthcare providers in good standing to use connected health to treat patients in any state during the

# Establishing the Provider-Patient Relationship

- **Medicare** allows video substitute for in-person exam: live, 2-way, real-time, A/V interactive communication\*
- **FSMB guidelines:** relationship can be established when physician is remote, with verified pt. ID & disclosure & validation of doc ID & credentials, + appropriate consents
- **AZ** does not require in-person exam to establish relationship – follows Medicare requirements (no S&F)
- **Required** to prescribe

*\* some telephonic services allowed for new pts. for PHE*





# Telemedicine Prescribing

- AZ Medical Board Policy Statement:  
Telemedicine should not be confused with internet prescribing.
  - Established provider-pt. relationship
  - Not just an internet questionnaire
  - Not just a phone call\*
- AZ law prohibits the use of telemedicine in abortions.  
(~20 other states also do.)



*\* Except for certain uses during PHE*

# The DEA & Telemedicine

- Ryan Haight Act (2009):
  - To prevent illegal distribution & dispensing of controlled substances through the Internet
  - Must write a valid prescription for a legit medical purpose
  - Must follow laws of pt. state
  - Must be issued by practitioner who has conducted at least 1 in-person medical eval of pt. **OR** who meets 1 of 7 telemedicine exceptions ...



# Ryan Haight Act: Telemedicine Exceptions

1. Pt is being treated by & located in a DEA-registered hospital or clinic (or VA practitioner)
2. Telemedicine conducted with pt. in physical presence of another practitioner with DEA registration in pt. state (or VA)
3. IHS or tribal organization
4. Public health emergency
5. Special registration for telemedicine
6. VA medical emergency with limitations
7. Other circumstances agreed on by HHS & DEA regulation





# DEA Updates



## Telemedicine

On January 31, 2020, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services issues a public health emergency ([HHS Public Health Emergency Declaration](#)).

**Question:** Can telemedicine now be used under the conditions outlined in Title 21, United States Code (U.S.C.), [Section 802\(54\)\(D\)](#)?

**Answer:** Yes

While a prescription for a controlled substance issued by means of the Internet (including telemedicine) must generally be predicated on an in-person medical evaluation ([21 U.S.C. 829\(e\)](#)), the Controlled Substances Act contains certain exceptions to this requirement. One such exception occurs when the Secretary of Health and Human Services has declared a public health emergency under 42 U.S.C. 247d (section 319 of the Public Health Service Act), as set forth in 21 U.S.C. 802(54)(D). Secretary Azar declared such a public health emergency with regard to COVID-19 on January 31, 2020 (<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/01/31/secretary-azar-declares-public-health-emergency-us-2019-novel-coronavirus.html>). On March 16, 2020, the Secretary, with the concurrence of the Acting DEA Administrator, designated that the telemedicine allowance under section 802(54)(D) applies to all schedule II-V controlled substances in all areas of the United States. Accordingly, as of March 16, 2020, and continuing for as long as the Secretary's designation of a public health emergency remains in effect, DEA-registered practitioners in all areas of the United States may issue prescriptions for all schedule II-V controlled substances to patients for whom they have not conducted an in-person medical evaluation, provided all of the following conditions are met:

- The prescription is issued for a legitimate medical purpose by a practitioner acting in the usual course of his/her professional practice;
- The telemedicine communication is conducted using an audio-visual, real-time, two-way interactive communication system; and
- The practitioner is acting in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws.

# DEA Letter

- March 31: Buprenorphine can be prescribed to new & existing pts with OUD for maintenance or detoxification tx on the basis of a **telephone eval**.
  - Must meet obligation to ensure Rx is for a legit medical purpose
  - Must feel adequate eval can be accomplished via telephone
  - DEA-registered as opioid treatment programs: if program physician, PCP, or authorized healthcare professional under supervision of program physician determines adequate eval can be done by phone
  - DATA-waivered practitioners complying with applicable standards of care
  - State laws override if more strict



# HHS OCR Enforcement Discretion: HIPAA

- No penalties for noncompliance with HIPAA rules for good faith provision of telehealth
- Can use any non-public-facing audio or video communication products
  - Examples: FaceTime, FB Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts, non-healthcare Zoom, Skype
- Notify pts. of potential privacy risks, enable all possible encryption & privacy modes
- Recommend using HIPAA-compliant
- For any medical condition – not just COVID-19
- For PHE only – doesn't impact state laws





## DOJ arrests 35 in \$2.1B Medicare scam targeting seniors for fraudulent genetic testing

by Heather Landi | Sep 30, 2019 7:45am



## Telehealth In the Spotlight as Justice Cracks Down on Medicare Fraud

As federal officials crack down on multi-million-dollar Medicare fraud cases involving telehealth companies, the American Telemedicine Association issues a statement regarding the illegal activities.

## Telehealth providers doing 'more visits than humanly possible' in a day draw CMS scrutiny

(Twitter) - yesterday Print | Email

[Tweet](#) [Share 14](#)

## mHealth Companies Fined for Medicare Fraud on Wearable Monitors

The makers and marketers of wearable monitoring have been fined for seeking Medicare reimbursement for services.

## Fed Crackdown on Genetic Testing Scam Targets Telemedicine Network

For the second time this month, the Justice Department has announced a crackdown on individuals and companies who have used telemedicine platforms in an attempt to collect improper

## Telemedicine Providers Charged in Medicare Fraud Investigation

Five telemedicine providers have been charged by federal officials in a massive Medicare fraud scheme that has reportedly cost the agency more than \$1.2 billion.



CMS Administrator Seema Verma reiterated the success of telehealth during the pandemic and said the agency continues to

# Stark Law



“Winter is coming.”



# Stark Law – Physician Self-Referral Law

- Prohibits **physicians** from referring pts. for healthcare service payable by **Medicare / Medicaid** to an entity with which the physician has a financial relationship
- Goal: protect pts. from being steered to less convenient, lower quality, more expensive services due to physician's financial self-interest
- Severe financial penalties (\$15K per wrongful claim + 3x amount of government overpayment)
- Intent is not required!
- Exceptions include compensation or leases at FMV





# Stark Law During COVID-19 PHE

- OK to pay physician above or below FMV
- OK to rent office space or lease equipment below FMV
- OK to loan with interest rate below FMV or on terms unavailable from lender
- Certain referrals OK



Never  
Mind?

# Anti-Kickback Statute (AKS)

- Severe financial penalties (Up to \$100K per wrongful claim) & up to 10 years in prison
- Applies to **anyone**, **all** federal healthcare programs
- Prohibits **knowingly** offering or soliciting **anything of value**, directly or indirectly, in return for pt. referrals for Medicare services
- Telehealth space & equipment can be problematic



# Anti-Kickback Statute – Safe Harbors

- HHS Office of the Inspector General
- Guidance letters for specific TH arrangements – “Safe Harbors”
- Specific to programs that requested
- Costly & lengthy process
- Fit into as many as you can!





# Violations can lead to more liability

- **False Claims Act:**

- Liability on persons & companies who defraud gov. programs
- If claim results from kickback or is made in violation of Stark Law, can form basis of FCA litigation - \$\$\$

- **Civil Monetary Penalties Law:**

- Prohibits inducements to beneficiaries
- Authorizes HHS OIG to impose fines for Medicare & Medicaid fraud



# OIG AKS & Civil Monetary Penalty Flexibility

- Ordinarily, if practitioners waive costs owed by federal healthcare program beneficiaries (coinsurance, deductibles, copays), implicates AKS & CMP law prohibition on “inducements to beneficiaries”
- Now, flexibility to reduce or waive beneficiary cost-sharing for telehealth visits paid for by federal healthcare programs
- For COVID-19 PHE Only



# Reverse False Claims Act

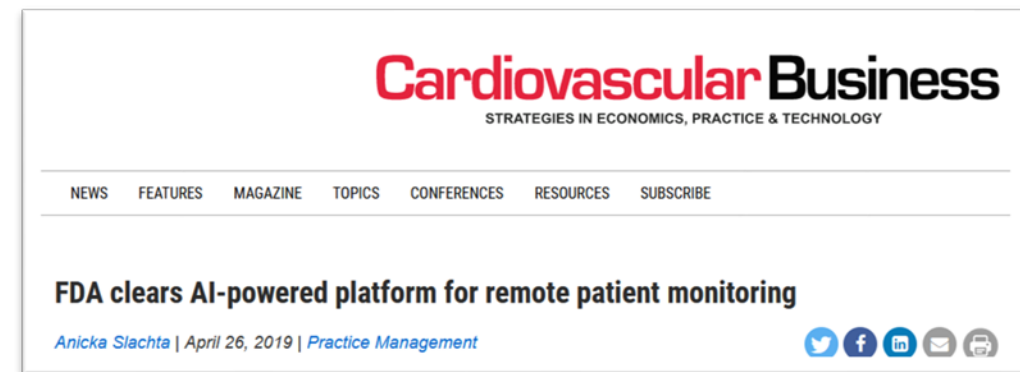


- Recipients of Medicare & Medicaid funds, if overpaid (any funds to which not entitled)
- When you have determined *or should have determined, through the exercise of reasonable diligence ...*
- After finding error, 60 days to report it & return funds to HHS (MAC) or the state
- Significant financial penalties



# Devices

- **FDA Final Guidance (9/2019):**
  - Telehealth products & tech are mobile medical apps if intended for use either as accessories to other regulated medical devices or to transform mobile tech platforms into regulated apps.
  - If HIT is intended for use in **diagnosis or treatment** = medical device
  - If poses “minimal risk,” FDA won’t enforce
- FDA “Pre-Cert” program for companies w/ “culture of quality,” “organizational excellence”



## FDA Clears 2 Wearable Devices for Monitoring Patient Vital Signs

The Food and Drug Administration has approved two wearable devices designed to monitor patient's vital signs.



## Telemedicine Platform Recalled Over Failure to Obtain Pre-Market Clearance or Approval from FDA

August 30, 2019

[in LinkedIn](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Send](#) [Embed](#)



WRITTEN BY:  
 Mintz - Health Care Viewpoints

# FDA Guidance on Digital Health Policies – PHE

- Most apps & software for public health surveillance & communication are not medical devices regulated by FDA, including contact & location trackers, educational info, videoconferencing platforms
- Expanded use of certain FDA-approved, non-invasive vital-sign measuring devices to be used by healthcare providers for RPM
- Relaxed certification on some Rx-only connected health tools designed to treat depression & other mental health conditions
- Won't enforce requirements for lower risk devices like screening & preventative recommendations, checklist of symptoms, questionnaire

## **FDA Eases Guidelines for New mHealth, Telemental Health Treatments**

The US Food and Drug Administration is easing pre-market certification requirements for new mHealth apps and telehealth tools designed to help patients and providers access mental health resources during the COVID-19 emergency.



# What About the Future of Telehealth Regulation?

## The COVID-19 Telehealth Expansion Bills Are Starting to Pile Up

Congress is very interested in expanding Medicare's telehealth coverage beyond the COVID-19 emergency, as the growing number of bills would attest.



Source: ThinkStock



By Eric Wicklund



July 31, 2020 - Senator Lamar Alexander has added another telehealth bill to the rapidly growing list of efforts to expand connected health coverage in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Tennessee Republican and chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions this week introduced the [Telehealth Modernization Act \(S. 4375\)](#), which aims

## Congresswoman's Telehealth Bill Combines 9 Other Pieces of Legislation

US Rep. Ann Wagner's Telehealth Act pulls together nine telehealth bills introduced over the past year - all by Republicans in a bid to give lawmakers one overarching piece of connected health legislation



Source: ThinkStock



By Eric Wicklund



August 18, 2020 - A Missouri Congresswoman has introduced a telehealth bill that combines nine other connected health bills into one piece of legislation.

[The Telehealth Act \(HR 7992\)](#), sponsored by US Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO), aims to give



## New Republican-Backed Telehealth Legislation Combines Nine Separate Bills

- Congresswoman Ann Wagner (MO) has introduced the [Telehealth Act \(HR 7992\)](#), a bill that combines other telehealth bills into one piece of telehealth legislation.
- According to her press release, Rep. Wagner's Republican colleagues support the overarching bill because the "patient-centered legislation bridges several Republican health care priorities."
- The following bullets list the telehealth bills included under the Telehealth Act and provide brief summaries.
- [The Advancing Telehealth Beyond COVID-19 Act \(HR 7338\)](#) focuses on continuing telehealth measures put in place by the CARES Act with emphasis on access to technology for seniors in rural areas.
- [The FASE Behavioral Health Services Act \(HR 5473\)](#) bypasses Medicare geographic restrictions and expands Medicare and Medicaid coverage of telemental services.
- The [Telemedicine Everyone Lifting Everyone's Healthcare Experience and Long Term Health \(TELEHEALTH\) HSA Act \(S 4039\)](#) makes permanent the preferred treatment of remote care services and telehealth in health savings accounts.
- The [VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act \(HR 3228\)](#) allows VA healthcare trainees and post graduates to use connected care platforms to treat veterans under supervision by VA-sanctioned providers.
- The [Telehealth Across State Lines Act \(HR 4900\)](#) creates a uniform standard of telehealth best practices nationwide as well as a grant program for telehealth in rural communities.
- The [Telehealth Response for E-prescribing Addiction Therapy Services \(TREATS\) Act \(S 4103\)](#) makes permanent some COVID telehealth measures that increased access to substance use disorder (SUD) treatment.
- The [KEEP Telehealth Options Act \(HR 7233\)](#) calls on several government departments to conduct studies on telehealth use and effectiveness during COVID.
- The [Enhancing Preparedness Through Telehealth Act \(S 3988\)](#) directs Health and Human Services to monitor telehealth programs to learn how telehealth is currently being used and how it can be more effectively used during emergencies.
- The [HEALTH Act \(HR 7187\)](#) makes Medicare coverage of federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics permanent.
- Read the full story [here](#).



# Telehealth Legislative Trackers

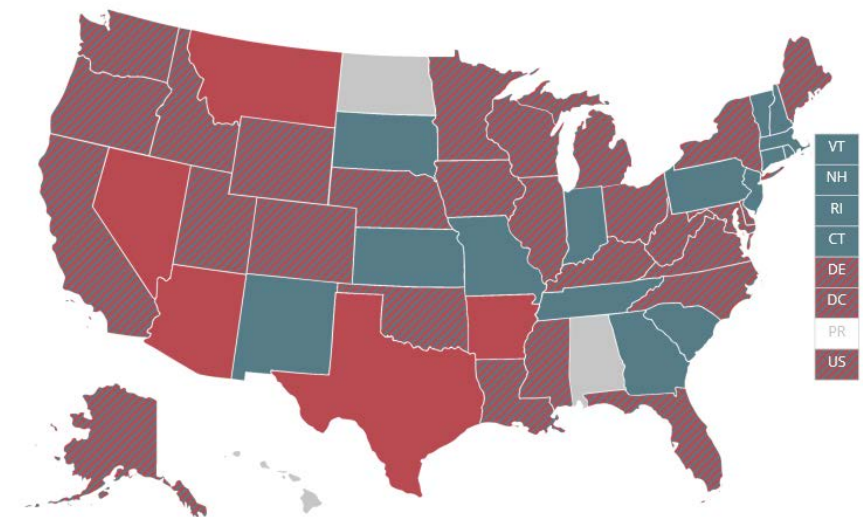
- States:  
Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP)  
<https://track.govhawk.com/reports/24PKO/public>
- Federal:  
Alliance for Connected Care  
<http://connectwithcare.org/telehealth-legislation/>



## Telehealth Legislation & Regulation

Utilize the interactive 50 state legislation and regulatory tracking tool, located below, to browse telehealth legislation and regulation across the nation for the current legislative session.

RETURN TO THE CENTER FOR CONNECTED HEALTH POLICY BY VISITING [WWW.CCHPCA.ORG](http://WWW.CCHPCA.ORG).



■ Jurisdictions with Bills
■ Jurisdictions with Registers
■ Jurisdictions with Bills and Registers

# Movement Was Already Occurring

- **DEA:** Special Reg. for Telemedicine due Oct. 2019
- **FDA:** Risk-based enforcement system – fall 2019
- **OIG:** Proposed AKS changes – fall 2019
- **CMS:** Proposed permanent exceptions to Stark Law for Value-based Care – fall 2019
- **Congress & CMS:** Chipping away at Medicare Restrictions since 2018
- **FSMB & Other Prof'l Associations:** Cross-state licensure compacts
- **AHCCCS:** Broadened telehealth coverage – fall 2019
- **AZ Legislature:** Expanded private payer coverage mandate – spring 2019



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# Thank you!

# Questions?

[nrowe@telemedicine.arizona.edu](mailto:nrowe@telemedicine.arizona.edu)

<https://southwesttrc.org/resources/covid19>