



April 25, 2017

The Honorable Joni Ernst
111 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mazie Hirono
730 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
124 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Julia Brownley
1019 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Hirono, Ernst, Representatives Thompson and Brownley:

Health IT Now (HITN) is writing to express our support for the *Veterans E-Health & Telemedicine Support (VETS) Act of 2017*. HITN is a diverse coalition of health care providers, patient advocates, consumers, employers, and payers who support the adoption and use of health IT to improve health care and to lower costs. We applaud your continued commitment to advancing telehealth to allow for better access to lower cost, quality care.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been a leader in telehealth. Through the use of technology, veterans can access the right care at the right time. Given the complex care needs of veterans and the growing strain on the resources of the Veterans Health Administration, telehealth has proven beneficial in alleviating stress on the VA system. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, approximately 12 percent of veterans received elements of their care via telehealth – and 45 percent of these veterans were located in rural areas.¹ Veterans enrolled in home telehealth for non-institutional care needs and chronic care management had a 59 percent decrease in VA bed days of care and a 31 percent decrease in VA hospital admissions.² Additionally, veteran satisfaction with telehealth is very high – 88 percent for home telehealth.³

Despite these advances and outcomes, artificial geographical restrictions on the use of telehealth constrain its use within the VA. Under current law, the VA can only waive state provider licensing requirements if both the physician and patient are located in a federally owned facility. Because a significant number of veterans live in rural areas, this requirement places a burden on veterans, who often must travel to federal facilities to receive care from a VA provider located in another state.

We applaud your efforts to remove these restrictions by allowing VA providers to treat veterans in their home, regardless of location. In a world of technology utilization, health care should not be restricted by state borders.

It is unacceptable that our veterans must overcome artificial barriers when attempting to access healthcare, and we commend you for your work to remove these restrictions. In order to advance access to better quality and

¹ VA Telehealth Services. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2017, from https://www.va.gov/PURCHASEDCARE/aboutus/news/VA_Telehealth_Services.pdf

² VA Telehealth Services. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2017, from https://www.va.gov/PURCHASEDCARE/aboutus/news/VA_Telehealth_Services.pdf

³ VA Telehealth Services. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2017, from https://www.va.gov/PURCHASEDCARE/aboutus/news/VA_Telehealth_Services.pdf

coordinated care via telehealth, HITN strongly supports the *VETS Act of 2017*. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to advance this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joel" being more prominent than the last name "White".

Joel White
Executive Director