



April 20, 2020

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2007 Medi-Cal: federally qualified health center: rural health clinic: telehealth --
SUPPORT

Dear Dr. Wood,

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth has become an essential tool in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 by limiting patient and provider exposure while allowing for patients to receive the care they need while remaining at home during physical distancing directives. Never before has the value of telehealth been as apparent as it has been during this crisis, and seeing that value in action has only strengthened the resolve with which the undersigned organizations are proud to co-sponsor of AB 2007 (Salas). AB 2007 would improve access to health care services for low-income children and other marginalized populations by ensuring that community health centers can continue to deliver care using telehealth.

Our four organizations advocate on behalf of children and families living in marginalized communities across the state, California's dental providers, and California's community health centers. We are all deeply committed to ensuring every individual in California has access to services that support their overall health and well-being. The COVID-19 crisis has made clear the importance of telehealth in providing safe and timely access to health care in California. In light of the importance of telehealth during this crisis, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has temporarily expanded telehealth options, including allowing community health centers the flexibility to use telehealth to provide care to both new and established patients. AB 2007 will ensure that this essential ability to establish patients using telehealth will remain in place after the emergency declaration ends.

Community health centers are critical sources of care in California, serving as a health care safety net for the most vulnerable populations. However, many of these centers do not have the physical capacity to meet all of the needs of the individuals in their service areas. Further, in addition to the socioeconomic barriers that prevent many patients from accessing care at health centers—such as an inability to take time off of work and a lack of affordable transportation—the COVID-19 crisis has created an environment where face-to-face visits need to be minimized to better protect healthcare workers and patients. In this emergency, community health centers are proving that telehealth is a safe and effective way to bring care to patients, making sure that—even when barriers exist—children and families can get the care they need.

Building on California's proactive steps to expand telehealth in this moment, the State can further address health care access barriers through AB 2007. By extending the current telehealth provisions, community health centers will be able to establish patients via telehealth for the purpose of billing at community sites, such as schools, early learning sites, and nursing homes.

One evidence-based example is the Virtual Dental Home (VDH), in which specially trained dental hygienists and assistants go to schools and other community sites to provide diagnostic, preventive, and early intervention dental care in partnership with a collaborating dentist. A six-year study of the VDH model, in which almost 3,500 individuals were seen in 50 community sites across California, found that the majority of patients could receive all of the care they needed at the community location. Moreover, the VDH model has allowed thousands more children to receive timely and needed dental care in their schools through the Medi-Cal 2020 waiver, without parents having to take time off of work or children having to miss school.

AB 2007 (Salas) will ensure that, as more care is provided through telehealth, we will have policies in place to support these innovative solutions to provide safe, high-quality care to California's most vulnerable populations. This simple clarification has the potential to increase access to vital and cost-effective health care services to thousands of patients in underserved communities across California—during times of crisis and always.

For these reasons, we strongly support AB 2007 (Salas). We respectfully ask for your AYE vote in the Assembly Health Committee.

Sincerely,

The Children's Partnership
Children Now
California Health+ Advocates
California Dental Association

Cc: Members, Assembly Health Committee
Assemblymember Rudy Salas, author