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The Telehealth Improvement for Kids' Essential Services (TIKES) Act of 2020

Across the nation, families experience barriers that prevent them from accessing routine and emergent health services, like a limited availability of providers or long wait times for an appointment. For many in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), increased access to telehealth services can mitigate those barriers to improve the timeliness and convenience of care delivery, while also improving health outcomes. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, a wide variety of policy waivers were put in place across the country to expand access to telehealth services, unleashing the power and potential of telehealth to safely and effectively provide care to children and families.

But, there's a wide variation in telehealth policies among State Medicaid programs, and as states consider how to expand coverage of telehealth services, there is limited guidance or information to aid in their planning. Furthermore, there are limited comprehensive studies specifically looking at the full effects of telehealth on the Medicaid population, including during a national public health emergency. According to MACPAC's March 2018 report on telehealth in Medicaid, states looking to expand telehealth in their Medicaid and CHIP programs would benefit from additional research and a more robust understanding of the effects of telehealth.

The TIKES Act of 2020

The TIKES Act would provide guidance and strategies to states on how to effectively integrate telehealth into their Medicaid and CHIP programs and take a comprehensive look at how telehealth impacts health care access, utilization, cost, and outcome. Furthermore, the bill promotes greater coordination among federal agency telehealth programs and policies for more efficient use of resources.

Specifically, the TIKES Act will:

- Provide states with guidance and strategies to increase telehealth access for Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) populations
- Require a MACPAC study examining data and information on the impact of telehealth on the Medicaid population
- Require a GAO study reviewing coordination among federal agency telehealth policies and examine opportunities for better collaboration, as well as opportunities for telehealth expansion into early care and education settings

