

July 17th, 2020 | Special Session, 2020
Insurance and Real Estate Committee

In Support of Increasing Access to Telehealth Services

Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon, Senator Kelly, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee,

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), based in Hartford. COHI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit and the only entity in the state with the sole mission of increasing access to quality, affordable oral health services for all Connecticut residents.

COHI supports using telehealth services as appropriate for addressing oral health and adding dentists licensed under chapter 379 of the general statutes to the list of telehealth providers.

Telehealth by dental providers, often referred to as teledentistry, has many uses. Some of the most common uses are treatment planning, patient education, and dental emergency or emergent issue screening. Teledental visits can be used to address the issue remotely, if possible, or to direct the patient to the appropriate place for treatment, preventing unnecessary emergency room visits. The ability to remotely consult with a patient regarding an emergent issue became extremely important during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and will be of the utmost importance again if Connecticut experiences a second wave of COVID-19.

In April, the Governor issued Executive Order Number 7DD which expanded the list of authorized telehealth providers to include dentists.ⁱ Extending that provision is a simple and helpful measure for Connecticut residents.

In addition to the role telehealth plays during the pandemic, telehealth is helpful to patients who lack reliable transportation or have limited mobility. Telehealth can increase patient/provider communication and address logistical barriers to care. The allowance of audio-only telehealth visits is also helpful for patients who lack internet access or a device for reliable video.

COHI supports extending the inclusion of dentists as telehealth providers and the option for audio-only telehealth visits through June of 2021. We also support a permanent inclusion of oral health and dental providers in Connecticut's telehealth services statute.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss this matter and offer our assistance. I am best reached via email at pareesa@ctoralhealth.org.

All the best,

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ⁱ <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7DD.pdf?la=en>