



**National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society**

# Telehealth and MS

## Request to Support:

- Telehealth Modernization Act (S.368/H.R. 1332)
- Protecting Access to Post-Covid-19 Telehealth Act of 2021 (H.R. 366)

### What is multiple sclerosis?

MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system.

The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted.

Nearly 1 million people in the United States live with MS.

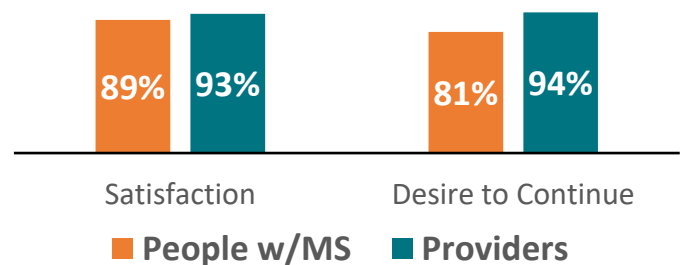
### Congress Must Ensure Telehealth Access Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

- These bills reduce barriers to continue seeing the benefits of telehealth. The bills will:
  - Build upon the expanded telehealth access allowed in the current public health emergency
  - Expand what kind of healthcare providers and facilities can provide telehealth services
- HR 366 also requires a study on the use of telehealth during the pandemic to inform future telehealth policies—including costs, uptake rates, health outcomes and racial and geographic disparities.

### Telehealth Should be an Integral Part of Healthcare Delivery

- The future of healthcare should include both in-person and telehealth visits with a patient and healthcare provider deciding together what best meets their needs.
- Telehealth can help address workforce shortages, including facilitating specialist care for rural populations or others who live far from specialists.
- During the pandemic, Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults were more likely to have used telehealth than non-Hispanic white adults.<sup>i</sup> More research is needed to fully understand how telehealth can support health equity.

### Views on Telehealth and MS



### Telehealth and MS

- Neurology had one of the highest adoption rates of any specialty during the pandemic.<sup>ii</sup>
- Both people with MS and MS healthcare providers (neurologists, physical therapists, mental health providers and more) reported high satisfaction rates with telehealth visits and want to continue using telehealth.<sup>iii iv</sup>

*We work with all companies, organizations and individuals that share our mission. On average, financial support from pharmaceutical companies over the last three years has accounted for less than 4% of Society funds. The Society independently develops public policy positions on issues that are important to people affected by MS.*

## Medicare Expanded Telehealth Just in Time



Kristen O'Toole

I never used telehealth until the pandemic. I was concerned about getting COVID, but I knew it was important for my health to keep up with my regular appointments.

I use a wheelchair and don't drive. So, when the paratransit I rely on was no longer an option for me during the pandemic, I turned to telehealth. Without access to telehealth over the past year, my physical and mental health would have likely deteriorated.

After Medicare loosened its telehealth regulations, I used it for appointments with my primary care physician and many of my specialists, including urology and psychology. I even did weekly physical therapy sessions over video conference from my living room, which allowed me to get much-needed exercise while staying safe.

“No matter how I am feeling or what the weather is like, or whether transportation is available, I can always make my telehealth appointments.”

Telehealth not only helped me physically stay well and keep my needed appointments, but it also helped with minimizing feelings of isolation over the past year.

Telehealth has been extremely important to me. It's one change from this pandemic that I really hope continues.

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<sup>i</sup> Smith, LB; Blavin, F. (2021, Jan 12). *One in Three Adults Used Telehealth during the First Six Months of the Pandemic, but Unmet Needs for Care Persisted*. Urban Institute.

<sup>ii</sup> 2020 State of Telehealth Report. <https://c8y.doxcdn.com/image/upload/Press%20Blog/Research%20Reports/2020-state-telehealth-report.pdf>. September 2020. (Accessed 3/15/2021).

<sup>iii</sup> Keszler, P; Maloni, H; Miles, Z.; Jin, S.; Wallin, M. George Washington University, VA Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence-East. (2021, Feb. 25). *Telehealth Utilization and Perceptions of Multiple Sclerosis Health Care Providers*. ACTRIMS 2021 Forum. <https://www.abstractsonline.com/pp8/#!/9245/presentation/197>

<sup>iv</sup> Wallin, M, personal communication, 2021, March 4. *Preliminary Data: 2020 Patient Telehealth Satisfaction Survey*.