

February 22, 2021

Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Chair Benson and Committee Members:

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing to support SF1160, The "Minnesota Telehealth Act", which provides a pathway for our patients to maintain access to high quality virtual care services.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric health care system. We see children from all 87 counties and 60 percent of the counties in the surrounding states. We serve an incredibly diverse patient population and more than 40 percent of our patients are insured through Medicaid.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic Children's Minnesota worked quickly to ramp up existing telehealth efforts and implement additional telehealth services. In 2020 we conducted more than 44,000 telehealth visits, and so far in 2021 12% of our care visits are virtual, compared to 1% in January, 2020. We have found that virtual care is complementary to in-person care and in some cases enhances care delivery. Some of the kids and adolescents we serve feel more comfortable seeing their health care provider in their own home. Seeing a child's home environment can also be helpful for providers and have positive implications for their care and health outcomes. Finally, children with special needs or complex care, such as those who are dependent on technology, have also benefited from expanded virtual care as it has protected them from unnecessary exposure and made care delivery more efficient for them and their family. The provisions outlined in SF1160 would give us the opportunity to continue to provide these valuable services long after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

As deliberations on SF1160 continue we ask you to consider the importance of health equity in all aspects of telehealth policy. Bridging the digital divide by addressing issues such as reliable internet or broadband connections, access to devices that support HIPAA-compliant technologies and culturally relevant tools that support digital and health literacy will be necessary to ensure that vulnerable populations in Minnesota are not left behind as telehealth policy progresses.

At Children's Minnesota, our vision is to be "every family's essential partner in raising healthier children." We support SF1160 because we know that telehealth is an important tool that allows us to give our patients and their families access to the care they need, in a way that serves them best. We hope we can count on your support for SF1160 and look forward to partnering with you to ensure the health and well-being of children in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Dr. Susan Sencer
Chief, Specialty Pediatrics
Children's Minnesota