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WHA Praises Senate Approval of Telehealth Improvement Bill

WHA-Supported Bill Can Increase Access to Care; Other States Have Seen Cost Savings

The Wisconsin Hospital Association praised the State Senate's action this afternoon approving WHA-supported legislation that will modernize state statutes related to the growing area of telehealth. The Senate's unanimous voice vote approving Senate Bill 380 is the latest example of the bill's overwhelming bipartisan support. The State Assembly could send the legislation to the Governor's desk as soon as this Thursday.

"Better leveraging telehealth technologies for health care delivery will give more patients access to Wisconsin's high-quality health care, regardless of where they live" said Eric Borgerding, WHA president and CEO. "And with experiences in other states showing that telehealth expansion can be cost-neutral or even save money, today's important step sets up Wisconsin for a win-win scenario."

Numerous studies, including Wisconsin's own state employee health insurance program, have determined that creating access to care through telehealth is a cost-effective strategy for spending precious state Medicaid dollars. The legislation is the culmination of three years of work by WHA's Telemedicine Work Group, and includes provisions implementing the work group's four recommendations for the state's Medicaid program:

- Cover telehealth the same as in-person care when the quality of the care provided is functionally equivalent.
- Catch up to Medicare in the number of telehealth-related services that are covered.
- Cover in-home or community telehealth services.
- Increase access to behavioral health via telehealth.

"Good health care policy in Wisconsin is more often than not achieved with bipartisan support, as this legislation again proves," Borgerding said. "We thank both sides of the aisle in the Senate for working together to move this important health care policy forward."

The State Assembly is scheduled to meet Thursday afternoon; companion legislation to SB 380, Assembly Bill 410, is on the tentative calendar.