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House Energy and Commerce Health subcommittee passes telemedicine-related opioid bills

By Meghan Hopkins

Recently, the House Energy and Commerce Health subcommittee passed a number of bills intended to address the nation's opioid crisis. Several of the bills specifically target issues related to telemedicine, a rapidly growing component of health care in the United States. These bills include:

- H.R. 5603, the Access to Telehealth Services for Opioid Use Disorders Act, which would provide the Secretary of Health and Human Services with the authority to waive certain Medicare telehealth requirements in the case of certain treatment of an opioid use disorder or co-occurring mental health disorder;
- The Improving Access to Remote Behavioral Health Treatment Act of 2018, which would amend the Controlled Substances Act to clarify the eligibility of certain community mental health centers to register for purposes of the practice of telemedicine; and
- H.R. 5483, the Special Registration of Telemedicine Clarification Act of 2018, which would specify the circumstances in which a special registration may be issued to a practitioner to engage in the practice of telemedicine.

Joel White, Executive Director of Health IT Now, remarked on the necessity for telemedicine and telehealth in this arena, asserting that these bills “fill an unmet need.” Elaborating on this point, White stated, “[t]he Subcommittee-passed telehealth bill, for example, is crucial because more than half of U.S. counties lack access to a single practicing behavioral health worker.”

The bills will now go to the full committee for a vote.

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