

[Representative Leger Fernandez Introduces NCUIH-Endorsed Legislation to Maintain Medicare Coverage for Audio-Only Telehealth Services in Indian Country](#)

Category: Policy Blog

written by Emily Larsen | August 19, 2024

On August 05, 2024, Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM-03) [introduced](#) the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH)-endorsed *Telehealth for Tribal Communities Act of 2024* ([H.R. 9271](#)) which would make permanent a Covid 19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) temporary provision allowing audio-only telehealth services for Medicare beneficiaries receiving care through Indian health programs or urban Indian organizations (UIOs). Providing access to audio-only telehealth services allows patients to access care even when broadband access is limited or unavailable. Prior to the PHE ending in May 2023, IHS patients used audio-only services 60% of the time and video telehealth 39% of the time, demonstrating how valuable this provision is to patients. This legislation will help address the persistent challenge of accessing healthcare in Indian Country.

“The National Council of Urban Indian Health is pleased to endorse the Telehealth for Tribal Communities Act introduced by Representative Leger Fernandez. This legislation is critical to increase access to care for our American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Maintaining the Public Health Emergency’s Medicare reimbursement of audio-only telehealth demonstrates a commitment to addressing health disparities in Native communities. I urge Congress to swiftly pass this bill, which is critical to ensure our patients have continuous access to culturally competent care wherever they reside,” **said Francys Crevier (Algonquin), CEO, National Council of Urban Indian Health.**

The bill was cosponsored by Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ-07), Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI-04), and Congressman Raul Ruiz (D-CA-25)

This bill is also endorsed by the National Indian Health Board, National Congress of American Indians, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, President Buu Nygren of The Navajo Nation, Health, Education and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, Jemez Health and Human Services Department in New Mexico, American Telemedicine Association, and Alliance for Connected Care.

Next Steps

The bill was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the House Committee on Ways and Means. It currently awaits consideration.

Resources

- Congresswoman Leger Fernández [Press Release](#)
- [Bill Text](#)
- [One Pager and Section by Section](#)