Representative Leger Fernandez Reintroduces NCUIH-Endorsed Legislation to Maintain Access to Audio-Only Telehealth Services in Indian Country

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written by Emily Larsen | April 30, 2025

On April 3, 2025, Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM-03) reintroduced the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH)-endorsed *Telehealth for Tribal Communities Act of 2025* (H.R. 2639) 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 grateful for Representative Leger Fernandez's dedication to improving health outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Maintaining the Public Health Emergency's Medicare reimbursement of audio-only telehealth will help our Native elders have continuity and access to critical health care," **said Francys Crevier (Algonquin), CEO, National Council of Urban Indian Health.**

The bill was cosponsored by Congressman Jay Obernolte (R-CA-23), Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury (D-NM-01), Congressman Raul Ruiz (D-CA-25), Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC-At Large), and Congresswoman Norma Torres (D-CA-35).

This bill is also endorsed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, National Indian Health Board, The Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board, National Congress of American Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, The Navajo Nation, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, and the American Telemedicine Association.

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