
FCC Chairman Announces Plan for \$200 Million COVID-19 Telehealth Program

Legal Alert

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Donna Urban

Calls for Swift Financial Support for Health Care Providers

On March 27th, the President signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to provide financial support to businesses, individuals, and various industries that have suffered a significant economic impact as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the CARES Act, Congress appropriated \$200 million to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to distribute funding to healthcare providers to support telehealth services during the pandemic. ([Click here for our March 30th legal alert detailing other aspects of the CARES Act relief.](#))

On March 30th, FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai, circulated proposed guidance to secure emergency approval to distribute the CARES Act funding to eligible healthcare providers for telehealth services. Telehealth services are critical as we engage in social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will help individuals access high quality healthcare without having to leave their homes for in-person doctor/hospital visits. If adopted by the Commission, the proposed program would help healthcare providers purchase telecommunications, broadband connectivity for patients, and at-home devices necessary for providing telehealth services. These services would directly help COVID-19 patients and also provide remote healthcare to patients with other conditions who might risk contracting the Coronavirus when visiting a healthcare provider. Chairman Pai stated:

As we self-isolate and engage in social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth will continue to become more and more important across the country. Our nation's healthcare providers are under incredible, and still increasing, strain as they fight the pandemic. My plan for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program is a critical tool to address this national emergency. I'm calling on my fellow Commissioners to vote promptly to adopt the draft order I circulated today, so that we can take immediate steps to provide support for telehealth services and devices to healthcare providers during this national crisis.

Eligible providers include a variety of public and private healthcare institutions, including not-for-profit hospitals, teaching hospitals, clinics, community health centers, and local health agencies. Providers would submit a streamlined application for financial assistance to the Commission, and the Commission would award funds to selected applicants on a rolling basis until the funds are exhausted or until the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

The commissioners are expected to vote on the proposed guidance package on an expedited basis with the hope that it can take effect as soon as possible. Once the guidance is adopted, Flaster Greenberg will provide an update on the provisions.

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For more information on the proposed guidance or the FCC's plan to secure funding for providers in the technical setup of their telehealth services, please contact Donna Urban or any member of Flaster Greenberg's Telecommunications Group.