



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Passes Bill to Expand Access to Telehealth Services

CATHARINE YOUNG June 24, 2015

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Bill adds occupational and physical therapists as eligible telehealth providers

ALBANY – Legislation passed recently by the State Senate, and championed by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean), Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, opens the door to telehealth options for physical and occupational therapy. It is an important step in the process of increasing healthcare availability for individuals in rural and remote areas.

Senate bill 5733 updates state law to allow occupational and physical therapists to provide services as telehealth practitioners, expanding access to care for individuals throughout New York State. This legislation was also passed by the Assembly and is awaiting the Governor's signature into law.

“As a direct result of provider shortages, geographic impediments, poor weather conditions, or restricted mobility, many people in New York State have limited access to quality healthcare. This is especially true in rural portions of the State where residents are isolated from larger communities where healthcare is readily available,” said Senator Young.

“I am working to increase the availability of telehealth services that use state-of-the-art technology to remotely connect healthcare providers with their patients. The health and economic benefits are impressive, and they include reductions in travel expenses, decreased absences from work, improved health outcomes, and fewer hospitalizations. It will allow patients to experience better continuity of care and remain more closely connected to their existing support systems,” said Senator Young.

Telehealth services are additional resources that provide patients with access to medical expertise otherwise not available, especially in rural areas. They function as complementary services to in-person care. As a result of this bill, patients will be able to utilize telehealth technologies for occupational and physical therapy services that would otherwise be covered if such services were administered in-person.

The legislation adds physical and occupational therapists to a long list of healthcare providers who will be allowed to provide telehealth services under Medicaid. These also include physicians, physician assistants, dentists, nurses, nurse practitioners, podiatrists, optometrists, psychologists, social workers, speech pathologists, midwives, diabetes educators, asthma educators, genetic counselors, hospitals, home care services agencies, hospices, or any other provider approved by the New York State Department of Health.

“I look forward to seeing telehealth technology used to help patients successfully navigate the challenges of physical and occupational therapy,” said Senator Young.

The bill is supported by the New York State Occupational Therapy Association and the New York Physical Therapy Association.

“We are very excited about the passage of this bill. Occupational therapists utilize telehealth as a delivery method to provide evaluations, treatments, and consultative services for their

clients. This legislation will increase consumer access to occupational therapy services throughout New York State, especially for those living in rural and underserved areas. We are extremely grateful to Senator Young and her staff who worked so quickly and diligently to include occupational therapy and physical therapy in this important law,” said Mr. Jeff Tomlinson, Legislative Chairperson for the New York State Occupational Therapy Association.

“The New York Physical Therapy Association thanks Senator Young and Assemblymember Gottfried for sponsoring this important legislation that includes physical therapists in the definition of telehealth provider. Telehealth is an innovative and cost effective care model that addresses barriers to access to health services, including physical therapy, in areas that experience health care disparities and lack of resources, such as rural areas of the State,” said New York Physical Therapy Association President Michael Mattia.

“As we work to address the health care needs of rural populations, it is important that we remove roadblocks to innovation and encourage the implementation of cutting-edge methods for delivering health care services. Telehealth offers substantial economic and health benefits. It also holds the potential to dramatically improve quality of life for many people in rural areas,” said Senator Young.