



**The Navajo Nation** **DR. BUU NYGREN** *PRESIDENT*  
**Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees** **RICHELLE MONTOYA** *VICE PRESIDENT*

June 6, 2024

The Honorable Teresa Leger Fernandez  
1510 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024**

Dear Congresswoman Leger Fernandez:

As President of the Navajo Nation ("Nation") I would like to take the opportunity to express my strong support for the Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024. This critical piece of legislation aims to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries who receive care under an Indian health program or from an urban Indian organization can continue to access audio-only telehealth services after 2024. This is a vital step toward addressing the healthcare disparities faced by tribal communities, particularly those related to broadband access.

The Navajo Nation is one of the largest tribes in the United States. We have over 400,000 members, half of whom are spread out across the Navajo Reservation, which encompasses over 17.5 million acres and overlaps with portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Thousands of our people live in remote locations and can only access modern medical services by first travelling across miles of dirt road that can become impassable during the winter and the wet spring as the snows melt and turn the dirt to mud. Reliable access to medical care from home is essential to the wellbeing of our people.

During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ("PHE"), Medicare's temporary reimbursement policies for audio-only telehealth services provided by the Indian Health Service ("IHS") demonstrated the essential role of telehealth in maintaining healthcare access. The ability for patients to receive care from their homes, without needing high-speed internet, proved indispensable. However, with the end of the PHE on May 11, 2023, and the subsequent extension of telehealth flexibilities under the Consolidated Appropriations Act only through December 31, 2024, it is imperative that we act now to make these provisions permanent.

The Navajo Nation has low rates of broadband connectivity, especially for some of our most rural communities, making audio-only telehealth a crucial service. The Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act ensures that services such as behavioral health counseling and group psychotherapy, which are vital to many Medicare beneficiaries, remain accessible. By removing the originating site requirements, this legislation will allow patients to receive care from the comfort of their homes, reducing the need for travel to healthcare facilities and thereby improving health outcomes.

It is well-documented that tribal communities face significant health disparities. Limited access to broadband should not exacerbate these disparities by restricting access to necessary healthcare services. The continuation of audio-only telehealth services is not just a matter of convenience but a matter of equity and justice for tribal communities.

Therefore, I extend my support for the Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024. Ensuring continuity of these services will have a profound impact on the health and well-being of not just Navajo, but all tribal Medicare beneficiaries, providing them with the reliable and accessible care they deserve.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to your support for this vital legislation. If you have any questions, or require additional information, please feel free to contact Mr. Justin Ahasteen, Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Washington Office at (202) 682-7390 or by email at jahasteen@nnwo.org. *Ahéhee'* (thank you).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Nygren', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Buu Nygren, *President*

**THE NAVAJO NATION**