

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

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House Bill 97 - Telehealth: Physician Assistants; Drugs

Sponsor Statement

The 2016 Medicaid Reform bill (SB 74) provided for the use of telehealth by revising Alaska statutes to require the Alaska Board of Medicine to adopt regulations and guidelines for physicians rendering a diagnosis, providing treatment, or prescribing, dispensing, or administering a prescription drug to a person without conducting a physical examination under AS 08.64.364.

Unintentionally, SB 74 only addressed physicians, and the Board issued guidelines that made different requirements for physician assistants (PAs) and physicians, citing a lack of legislative intent that the provisions of SB 74 should apply to PAs.

The omission of PAs from the Medicaid Reform bill led to them being subject to limitations on the use of telemedicine. Specifically, the Medical Board released guidelines stating that physician assistants could not treat a patient via telemedicine without first conducting an in-person examination, or with a collaborating physician or other practitioner in the same group practice.

House Bill 97 aligns the law with the intent of the Medicaid Reform bill, clarifying that PAs can provide telemedicine in the same manner as physicians. Under HB97, the PA would be subject to the same statutory oversight as physicians regarding the practice of telemedicine, as well as the same disciplinary sanctions when appropriate.

Alaska, with its vast geographical challenges and limited access to vital healthcare, stands to benefit from this legislation. HB 97 will increase patient access to care, extending the reach of medicine to medically underserved areas.