



April 2, 2019

Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK. 99801

Dear Representative Spohnholz,

On behalf of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and its Board of Directors, I am writing to express support for HB 29 "Insurance Coverage for Telehealth." The Mat-Su Health Foundation shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center and invests its profits from that partnership back into the community to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in the Mat-Su.

Requiring insurers to offer coverage for services provided via telemedicine supports goals identified by the Mat-Su Health Foundation's two most recent Community Health Needs Assessments. These assessments, which were conducted with community partners in 2016 and 2013, included extensive data analysis, public polling and community forums. Transportation was identified as the number one factor affecting health in our community in the 2016 study, and access to care was identified as a top ten health issue in the 2013 study.

Being able to access traditional health care requires reliable, affordable transportation. Telemedicine eliminates this barrier that adversely affects those without access to transportation. It also allows for easier access to care for individuals experiencing limited mobility and those who are care givers to young children or older Alaskans and thus find it difficult to be away from home. The cost to travel to both receive and provide health care is tremendous for patients and providers. Patients postpone preventative care, medication refills, and early intervention due to access, cost, weather and lack of time. This increases overall health costs because we people wait to treat problems until they become a crisis instead of earlier when care is less expensive. While many patients in rural areas – including the more rural parts of Mat-Su – can benefit from telemedicine, this is not just a rural issue; patients who struggle with medical conditions that make it difficult, uncomfortable, or exhausting to see a provider in person for treatment can benefit no matter where in Alaska they live.

A factor that increases access to care is having an ongoing relationship with a primary care provider. In 2017, 72.2% of Mat-Su adults and 89.3% of adults 65 years or older had a regular primary care provider. Mat-Su and Alaska have not achieved the Healthy People 2020 Goal of 83.9% of the general population having a regular primary care provider. The 2019 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps data shows the ratio of Mat-Su primary care providers to be one physician to 2,130 persons, which is lower than the statewide average of 1,110:1. Requiring insurers to pay for telemedicine will provide more access and help address the shortage of primary care providers.

Thank you for introducing this important legislation. If there anything the Mat-Su Health Foundation can do to help, please don't hesitate to contact me directly via email: eripley@healthymatsu.org.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ripley
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Rep. David Eastman; Rep. DeLena Johnson; Rep. Mark Neuman; Rep. Sullivan-Leonard; Rep. Tilton; Rep. Rauscher