



Representative Ivy Spohnholz

House Health & Social Services Committee Chair

*Serving District 16: College Gate, Russian Jack, Nunaka Valley, Reflection Lake & Wonder Park
Committee Member: Education, Energy, Military & Veterans Affairs, Legislative Budget & Audit*

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 358

Insurance Coverage for Telehealth

“An Act relating to insurance coverage for benefits provided through telehealth; and providing for an effective date.”

HB 358 will enhance access to health care services, primarily mental health and primary care, for Alaskans who have insurance plans with Moda, Premiera Blue Cross, United Healthcare, and Aetna Life Insurance, to name a few. HB 358 does this by requiring the insurers previously listed to provide insurance coverage for health care services provided through telehealth. Increasing access to health care services throughout Alaska is crucial. Because of our unique geographical landscape and our rural and aging communities spread out across the state, telehealth can enhance access to health care and improve clinical outcomes.

Here are some of the advantages of telehealth:

- Better access and privacy in rural, remote, and urban areas of Alaska
- Early intervention which can lead to savings
- Greater access for referrals to providers who specialize in treating specific health issues
- Better, and potentially quicker, access means a potential reduction in suicides, domestic violence and other serious events
- Zero impact on state budget

Under HB 358, telehealth benefits for all covered health care services, including mental health benefits, will be reimbursable for health care providers licensed in the state without an initial in-person appointment. Depending on the patient's needs, a telehealth appointment can provide education, reviewing of prescriptions and checking symptoms, all at a distance on a secure system.

Health care services delivered via telehealth is happening all over the country, and Alaska is at the forefront of providing telehealth services for urban, rural, aging, and the underserved communities across the state.

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