



**Senate Human Services Committee
HCR 3014
March 29, 2021**

Chair Lee and Committee Members, I am Courtney Koebele, the Executive Director of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students.

NDMA supports HCR 3014 which provides that legislative management consider studying solutions to provider and end-user barriers to access to and utilization of telehealth services in the state.

Telehealth technology has an opportunity to address some of the greatest challenges facing the health care system in North Dakota, including access, quality, and cost of care. However, impediments to the adoption and utilization of telehealth persist as a result of uncertainties in health insurance coverage and reimbursement. This, in turn, undermines any potential benefits the health system and residents may reap related to improvements in access to and value of care associated with the use of telehealth technology.

Telehealth directly addresses challenges of access facing North Dakota patients by allowing them to see their providers without the inconvenience—or impossibility—of traveling to the office. This technology can address inequities in access to care for patients who have difficulty traveling to a physician office because of location-, age-, disability-, and/or socioeconomic status-related challenges. Telehealth can be particularly useful in expanding access to psychiatric care, allowing patients receive crucial treatment in the comfort of their home.

Telehealth can also improve the quality of care provided. Uses of the technology span from the most critical ICU patients who can be closely monitored via innovative technologies available from tele-ICU services to providing 24-7 access to urgent care telehealth as an alternative to emergency department visits.

Telehealth can allow for better follow-up care after a procedure by allowing frequent, brief check-ins by physicians and nursing staff, and it can allow for greater care coordination, medication adherence, etc. Many rigorous studies have demonstrated the increased quality of patients receiving telemedicine care.

There are also barriers to the users of telehealth – the patients. There is a lack of internet access and access to devices to facilitate telehealth. Telehealth was essential to keeping people healthy and safe during the pandemic, and it has great potential to increase healthcare access. However, it can also be stressful for those without the proper tools to access telehealth.

A study which provides solutions to these barriers would be good for North Dakota. NDMA urges a DO PASS on HCR 3014.

Thank you.