



May 20, 2020

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Casey
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging, we are pleased to support the Advancing Connectivity during the Coronavirus to Ensure Support for Seniors Act (ACCESS Act, S. 3517). We applaud bipartisan efforts to address critical issues facing older adults and their families in the context of the current global pandemic and beyond.

The Center for the Future of Aging is committed to advancing awareness of the significant risks of COVID-19 and promoting evidence-based solutions to lessen the negative impacts of the virus on older adults and other at-risk populations. This legislation provides critical support for telehealth services to ensure that residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities can communicate with their loved ones.

Due to the high rate of infection, many nursing home residents have not been able to receive visitors, and as a result, are at increased risk of social isolation. A recent study from the National Academy of Sciences found that social isolation has been associated with a significantly [increased risk](#) of premature mortality, including a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia. Furthermore, nearly [75 percent](#) of people age 80 and older with dementia live in a nursing home compared with only 4 percent of the general population at age 80+. These residents are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 outbreaks, and family members have [expressed great concern](#) about their inability to check on their safety and well-being.

The Center for the Future of Aging put forward the following new [recommendations](#) to increase telehealth capacity and virtual triage to help avoid preventable hospitalizations and reduce the risk of infection for people living with dementia:

- Increase funding for the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program to build geriatric knowledge across the care system and improve understanding of how age-related diseases impact COVID-19
- Provide age-friendly care for older adults with dementia to reduce risk and limit exposure to COVID-19

- Develop and train workers to manage COVID-19 for people living with dementia in long-term care facilities
- Increase the cultural competency of the workforce to meet the needs of diverse older adults with dementia who are at increased risk from COVID-19
- Provide family caregivers with the tools, information, and support to meet the unique challenges of caring for people living with dementia during this pandemic

Through our work, we have advocated for the broader adoption and reimbursement for telehealth and its ability to revolutionize the delivery of health and long-term care delivery. This legislation takes an important step to expand access to other health providers and maintain ties to family and friends for those living in the most vulnerable of settings. We believe the passage of the ACCESS Act elevates these critical challenges at a time when a unified response to this crisis remains paramount.

Sincerely,

Paul H. Irving
Chairman
Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging



Nora Super
Senior Director
Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging



Attachment

Cc: The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chairman,
Senate Committee on Finance

The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance