

Helping Veterans Access Health Care

Written by Grassley Press
Tuesday, 24 May 2011 11:39

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Q. Can veterans access telehealth services?

A. Telehealth uses telecommunications technologies to deliver health care services, including medical consultations, prescriptions, preventive care and curative medicine. Using telehealth could mean a phone call with a doctor about symptoms, or a trip to a local hospital for a high-tech appointment or treatment with a specialty doctor located hundreds of miles away. For veterans in rural areas of the country, telehealth services improve access to care. Seeing a specialist in person, without telehealth, can require many hours of driving and overnight trips. For some older or disabled veterans, these trips can be especially difficult and may discourage them from taking preventive measures or seeking necessary health care. The telehealth programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enable veterans to access health care from home or a local or conveniently located medical center. Telehealth also reduces costs for the VA. I recently reintroduced legislation with Senator Mark Begich of Alaska, which would help more veterans to access telehealth services.

Q. What would your telehealth legislation do?

A. Some veterans who do not have a disability related to their military service are assessed copayments for VA medical care. The bipartisan legislation, which I also cosponsored in 2010, would waive veterans' copayments for telehealth services. Right now, veterans' copayments can be as high as \$50 when specialized care is needed. The goal of our legislation is to encourage more veterans to take advantage of this user-friendly, lower-cost alternative. Accessing care through telehealth helps us to meet the promise made to America's veterans

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that they would receive the care they need. Already, thousands of Iowa's veterans have enrolled in telehealth programs, and many more could take advantage of this service. The elimination of copayments for telehealth would lessen the financial burden on those enrolled today and encourage other veterans to use this high quality and cost-effective health care delivery system. The option of telehealth is a win-win for veterans and taxpayers.

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