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Improving Access to Telehealth: The Case for Interstate Medical Licensure Compact

With a Focus on Rare Diseases and Chronic Illnesses

Although it is a fundamental human right, many Americans still struggle to obtain access to healthcare. This is especially true for those who have chronic illnesses and rare disorders because they frequently confront great obstacles in getting the care they require (Sroberts, 2023). Many of these individuals reside in distant or underdeveloped regions where there are few medical specialists, which makes these difficulties even more difficult (NRHA, 2022). Fortunately, telemedicine has become a viable answer to these issues, especially since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving patients a way to get care while remaining in their own homes. However, the broad use of telehealth is still constrained by numerous obstacles, particularly those related to medical licensing. The solution? The Interstate Medical Licensure Compact.

Patients with rare diseases and chronic illnesses undoubtedly confront major obstacles to receiving care. These individuals frequently need specialized care from medical professionals with knowledge of their specific illness. However, especially in rural or underdeveloped areas, these professionals are frequently hard to come by. This implies that in order to get the care they require, patients may have to travel a vast distance, frequently at great expense. There are few therapy alternatives available to many people because this is simply not an option for them.

With the ability to obtain care from the convenience of their homes, telehealth presents a promising answer to this issue. Patients with rare diseases or chronic illnesses, who often need ongoing therapy or regular check-ins with their doctors, should pay particular attention to this. These patients won't have to go far or disturb their life (or the lives of their other family members, for example) in order to get the care they require thanks to telehealth (*What Is Telehealth?* | *Telehealth.HHS.gov*, 2023).

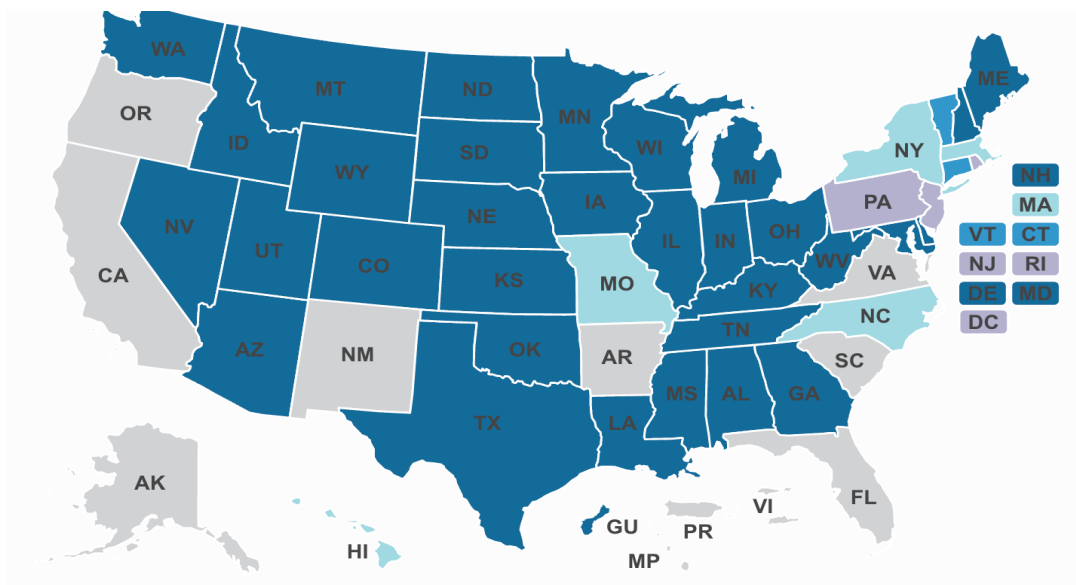
As previously stated, the broad use of telehealth is still constrained by numerous obstacles, particularly those related to medical licensing. Doctors must seek additional licenses to practice medicine in other states in the United States since each state in the country issues its own licenses to do so. In particular for patients who reside in states with a lack of medical specialists, this might be a substantial obstacle to telemedicine. Patients may have trouble getting the care they require, even if it is available in another state, if doctors cannot work across state lines.

The Interstate Medical Licensure Compact is a major step forward and frankly a clear answer to this issue. By establishing a system of accelerated licensure for doctors who seek to practice in multiple jurisdictions, this proposed regulation would make it simpler for physicians to work across state lines. Doctors would be able to acquire licenses in numerous states more swiftly and easily under this arrangement than they can now. Patients would find it much simpler to access the care they require, wherever they may live, and clinicians would find it much easier to perform telehealth across state lines (*Physician License | Interstate Medical Licensure Compact*, 2023).

The Interstate Medical Licensure Compact has many advantages, which are obvious. Patients with rare diseases and chronic illnesses, who frequently experience severe barriers to

receiving care, would have more access to care if it were simpler for doctors to practice across state lines. Additionally, it would be simpler for medical professionals to engage in telemedicine, which might save patient expenses and enhance outcomes. By making it simpler for doctors to practice in various states, the Compact would also alleviate the scarcity of medical specialists in many areas of the country.

Of course, the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact could also have certain drawbacks. By allowing doctors to practice in areas where they are unfamiliar with the local healthcare system, some critics claim it could lower the quality of care. Others contend that it might make it easier for doctors to work in states with higher reimbursement rates, which could worsen the scarcity of medical specialists in some regions. The potential advantages of the Compact, however, exceed these worries. It would contribute to better health outcomes and lower healthcare costs if patients with rare diseases and chronic illnesses had better access to care. Making it simpler for doctors to practice in various states will also aid in addressing the country's lack of a sufficient number of medical specialists in many areas (mHealthIntelligence, 2018).



- = Compact Legislation Introduced
- = IMLC Member State serving as State of Principal License (SPL) processing applications and issuing licenses*
- = IMLC Member State implementation mixed - MD Board is serving as SPL processing applications and issuing licenses - DO Board is serving as non-SPL issuing licenses only*
- = IMLC Member State non-SPL issuing licenses*
- = IMLC Passed; Implementation In Process or Delayed*

So far, the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact is processing applications in 39 states, the District of Columbia, and Guam (Sutherland, 2023). However, some of the states that you would expect to be more advanced in this process (especially in the northeast) are not, like Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Referring to the map above, you can see that the states in dark blue are actually the most advanced, and thus physicians with primary licensure in those states now have easier access to licensure in other states to increase their reach to populations who need it most, including the rare disease and chronic illness community. You can read more about the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact on their website (*Physician License | Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, 2023*).

In conclusion, the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact is a policy initiative that has promise for enhancing patients' access to telemedicine, especially for those with chronic illnesses and rare diseases. The Compact would enhance outcomes, save costs, and facilitate the practice of medicine across state lines. The Compact may have some drawbacks, but these are outweighed by its potential advantages. I therefore urge decision-makers to take the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact into account as a means of enhancing access to healthcare for all Americans, wherever they may reside and whatever conditions they may be facing.

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