Nemours Actively Supports Federal Legislation to Reduce Medicaid Barriers to Telehealth for Children

WASHINGTON (October 1, 2020) – Nemours Children's Health System applauds Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-Del.) and Congressman Michael C. Burgess (R-Texas) for their leadership in introducing the *Telehealth Improvement for Kids' Essential Services (TIKES) Act of 2020*. Nemours has been a vocal advocate for policies, like the TIKES Act, that remove barriers to covering care provided via telehealth for families receiving Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) benefitDuring the COVID-19 public health emergency, telehealth became crucial for countless families abiding by public health recommendations to temporarily avoid in-person medical visits. Government policy waivers were highly effective in unleashing the power and potential of telehealth to provide safe care to children and families. At Nemours, in the early days of the pandemic response, telehealth visits increased 2,400% and expanded coverage allowed the health system to be reimbursed fairly for the services provided.

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"Telehealth has facilitated the delivery of high-quality, efficient care to millions of American children. The public health challenge of COVID-19 highlighted its effectiveness and proved that it will be valuable as a permanent part of the US healthcare system," said R. Lawrence Moss, MD, FACS, FAAP, president and CEO of Nemours Children's Health System. "The emergency-driven easing of state and federal regulatory barriers to telehealth demonstrated how quickly policy makers, payers, and providers can work together on behalf of patients and families. I commend the leadership of Congresswoman Blunt Rochester and Congressman Burgess in responding to issues raised by health systems like Nemours by introducing this important legislation."

Currently, there is wide variation in telehealth policies among state Medicaid programs. This legislation creates an opportunity for the federal government to provide more clarity to states as they consider how to expand coverage of telehealth services. The TIKES Act would require the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to provide states with guidance and strategies to increase telehealth access for children covered under Medicaid and CHIP, which cover care for those who can least afford it. The legislation would also promote greater coordination among federal agencies regarding their telehealth programs and policies and recommend a long-term evaluation of the impact of telehealth use across Medicaid programs.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed for us to make rapid progress on expanding access to telehealth so children and families across the country, especially those in rural and underserved communities, face fewer barriers to accessing medical care," said Rep. Blunt Rochester. "With the introduction of the TIKES Act, we can continue that progress by bringing better alignment and clarity to Medicaid telehealth policies, as well as provide guidance to state Medicaid programs on the opportunities telehealth services can have for children. I'd like to thank my colleague, Congressman Burgess, for joining me in this critical effort."

"Amidst the pain and suffering that our nation has endured throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a major takeaway has been the advantage of telehealth. There is a convenience factor to not having to take time to physically transport yourself to the doctor's office and have your child sit in a waiting room with other potentially sick patients," said Rep. Burgess. "This bipartisan legislation will improve utilization of telehealth by requiring the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide guidance to states on how to make the most of telehealth options in their Medicaid and CHIP programs. Additionally, it directs studies to gather data that can help inform future telehealth policy. I urge my fellow members to support this legislation that will help build upon the telehealth foundation that we have built this year."

"While providers across the country have taken swift action to ramp up telehealth capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, we need long-term solutions to reduce barriers to provide safe and reliable care via telehealth. Introduction of the TIKES Act is an important step forward," said Carey Officer, operational vice president of Nemours Center Health Delivery Innovation (CHDI).

Nemours has a longstanding commitment to improving access to care through digital health strategies. Nemours implemented their electronic health record over 20 years ago and uses cutting-edge technology to ensure patients' records are correctly matched and data is used to facilitate high quality care that leads to good outcomes. In addition, Nemours created the CHDI, which developed their telehealth platform, CareConnect, as well as continuum of care apps for specific chronic conditions such as asthma, partnerships with school nurses, and health education through KidsHealth.org, the world's most visited website for physician-reviewed information and advice on children's health.

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About Nemours Children's Health System

Nemours is an internationally recognized children's health system that owns and operates the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del., and Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Fla., along with outpatient facilities in five states, delivering pediatric primary, specialty and urgent care. Nemours also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org and offers on-demand, online video patient visits through Nemours CareConnect.

Established as The Nemours Foundation through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, Nemours provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to families in the communities it serves.

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