

Crapo Statement at Hearing on COVID-19 Health Care Flexibilities
May 19, 2021

Washington, D.C.--U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at a hearing entitled, "COVID-19 Health Care Flexibilities: Perspectives, Experiences and Lessons Learned."

The text of Ranking Member Crapo's remarks, as prepared, is below.

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

"Congress and the Administration provided certain health care flexibilities during the pandemic so that patients could continue to receive high-quality care.

"Making permanent changes based on lessons learned is a top priority.

"I have shared my interest with President Biden's nominees for the key health care positions that have come before this Committee, and appreciate their commitment to work with me and this Committee.

"Republicans and Democrats often disagree on the best way to achieve shared health care goals.

"This hearing, however, highlights an area of common ground.

"In fact, Senator Wyden and I asked the majority and minority staff to jointly plan this hearing, demonstrating strong bipartisanship.

"Acting on legislative changes and using administrative authority, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services waived over 200 payment rules during the pandemic in Medicare alone.

"Needless to say, there is a lot we can learn.

"Today's witnesses will provide insight to guide our efforts in evaluating these flexibilities.

"Hearing first-hand about the patient experience during the pandemic from providers who overcame challenges to provide care will be invaluable.

"Understanding how the flexibilities are used in fee-for-service, Medicare Advantage and in alternative payment models will be insightful.

“Much of the hearing will focus on care provided during the pandemic through telehealth.

“Telehealth has been a lifeline for patients and providers, especially in the early months of the pandemic.

“The reliance on telehealth increased in rural and urban areas alike, allowing patients to receive remote care from the safety of their home.

“Telehealth services have been especially useful for Idahoans.

“According to the Idaho Department of Insurance, telemedicine visits went from an average of about 200 appointments per month to 28,000 telehealth visits in April 2020 alone.

“To ensure financial stability, providers have been paid at the same rate as if the service was furnished in-person.

“This has facilitated care that otherwise would be risky or unavailable, and patients have appreciated the convenience.

“It has reduced the frequency of missed appointments, and assisted provider investment in the infrastructure needed for remote care.

“This long period of expanded telehealth will help us understand the impact on quality of care and program costs.

“It serves as a robust test project on a scale few could have imagined.

“The promise of telehealth is clear, but it is important that we gather evidence on its impact on access, quality and cost.

“There are approaches to providing care in the most efficient setting that go beyond telehealth.

“Some hospitals are using a waiver that provides flexibility to triage patients who present to the hospital to see if they can be best cared for in their home.

“Whether through telehealth, “hospital at home”, or other innovative care arrangements, it is important to find ways to get patients care that best meets their needs, and at the lowest cost possible.

“Congress has taken permanent steps to do just that in recent years.

“Nephrologists can conduct remote evaluations of patients receiving home dialysis.

“Providers can administer certain drugs to vulnerable patients in their own homes.

“Hearing from our provider witnesses helps us to continue down this path.

“The Government Accountability Office will supplement what we hear from our provider experts, offering a perspective on how to track and evaluate flexibilities in Medicare and Medicaid as we chart the right course forward.

“I fully expect we will take what we learn from this hearing to continue our bipartisan efforts to help providers give patients the best care possible.

“Permanent changes based on lessons learned from the pandemic to modernize Medicare payment systems lends to the pressing need to address Medicare’s financial struggles.

“Identifying smart reforms that make Medicare more efficient will be better for patients and better for taxpayers.

“Such changes alone will not put Medicare on a sustainable path, but they should be part of that broader conversation.

“Addressing Medicare solvency should also be a bipartisan issue, with time best spent determining how to shore up the current system instead of expanding it to a broader population.

“Finding the right path on these priority issues is important to patients and the health programs in the Committee’s jurisdiction.

“This hearing will help us to capitalize on the bipartisan opportunity.

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.”

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