



# Northwest Society of Addiction Medicine

*A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine*

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February 11, 2021

The Honorable Judy Lee  
Chair, Senate Committee on Human Services  
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Sakakawea Room  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0601

Re: Support for SB2179

Dear Chairperson Lee and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

On behalf of the Northwest Society of Addiction Medicine (NWSAM), the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in North Dakota who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, we would like to take this opportunity to provide our support for SB2179, which would dramatically expand access to healthcare through the expansion of telehealth flexibilities. With opioid-involved deaths rising, likely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that North Dakotans have access to high-quality, evidence-based and comprehensive addiction treatment.<sup>i</sup>

By expanding the definition of telehealth to include audio-only telephone if no other means of communications technology is available, and ensuring that services delivered through telehealth are covered and reimbursed as favorably as those services delivered in-person, this bill will dramatically boost access to addiction treatment. Telehealth can allow for more frequent communication with a patient's addiction care team, provide additional privacy, help address the stigma of receiving addiction treatment, give clinicians insight into patients' personal lives, and possibly improve the therapeutic alliance.<sup>ii</sup> Furthermore, the cost savings associated with improved access to telehealth are also substantial, with one study finding that telehealth diverts patients from more expensive care settings.<sup>iii</sup> This same study found that cost savings were sufficient to offset the additional utilization of healthcare services caused by the convenience and accessibility of telehealth to patients.

NWSAM appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this legislation, and shares the state of North Dakota's goal of ensuring that healthcare services, including addiction treatment, are accessible to all. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact NWSAM's president, Dr. Robert Sherrick, at (406) 206-3885 at [drbobsh@gmail.com](mailto:drbobsh@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Robert Sherrick, MD, FASAM  
President, Northwest Society of Addiction Medicine

CC:

The Honorable Jim Roers

The Honorable Howard Anderson

The Honorable David Clemens

The Honorable Oley Larsen

The Honorable Kathy Hogan

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<sup>i</sup> Shirley, Hannah. (2020). "Grand Forks law enforcement, state officials report increase in opioid overdoses during pandemic." The Grand Forks Herald. Available at:

<https://www.grandforksherald.com/newsmd/coronavirus/6648974-Grand-Forks-law-enforcement-state-officials-report-increase-in-opioid-overdoses-during-pandemic>

<sup>ii</sup> Uscher-Pines, L., Huskamp, A., Mehrotra, A. (2020). Treating Patients With Opioid Use Disorder in Their Homes. Chicago, Illinois: The American Medical Association. Available at

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2766674>

<sup>iii</sup> Nord, G., Rising, K., Band, R., Carr, B., Hollander, J. (2019). On-demand synchronous audio video telemedicine visits are cost effective. Available at: [https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757\(18\)30653-3/fulltext](https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757(18)30653-3/fulltext)