



Licensing Requirements Holding Back Telemedicine

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Imagine that you suffer from a heart condition that requires daily monitoring of your resting heart rate, blood pressure, and other vital signs. Rather than daily hospital or doctor visits, you might use at-home monitoring devices that record your data and relay them to your doctor, who could decide if any intervention is necessary. Your healthcare costs would be significantly reduced, and you wouldn't have to suffer the added inconvenience of regular, and perhaps daily, doctor visits. This scenario is an example of telemedicine, a common-sense application of innovations in medical and telecommunications services. And especially as the technology behind it improves, telemedicine offers an opportunity for patients to receive quality healthcare at a significantly reduced cost.

Unfortunately, state medical licensing restrictions often serve as a barrier to the expansion of telemedicine. Currently, physicians are required to obtain a medical license in any state where they practice, as defined by the location of their patients. For example, if a doctor in Missouri wants to use telemedicine to treat a patient in Illinois, that doctor would generally need to have a license to practice medicine in Illinois.

We have weighed on this topic [at length in the past](#) , and a recent analysis by Shirley Svorny of

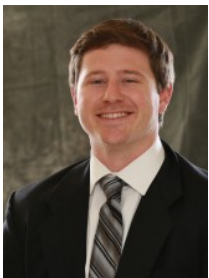
the Cato Institute, titled "[Liberating Telemedicine: Options to Eliminate the State-Licensing Roadblock](#)," brings the licensing issue back to center stage in the national health care policy conversation.

Svorny's essay offers the following four possible remedies for bringing down licensing barriers to care, particularly for physicians engaged in telemedicine practices.

- Eliminating government licensing of medical professionals altogether.
- Redefining the location of the interaction between patients and physicians from that of the patient to that of the physician.
- For individual states to open their markets to physicians licensed in other states.
- For the federal government to offer national telemedicine licenses

The essay includes a detailed pros-and-cons analysis of each recommendation. Svorny argues that implementing one or more of these reforms would have many advantages, including expanding access to specialists for individuals in rural areas and decreasing the cost of health care for patients across the country without sacrificing patient safety or healthcare quality. Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with Svorny's proposals, the essay is worth a read.

About the Author



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Andrew Aubuchon is a policy intern working on corporate welfare topics.

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