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Comprehensive Bipartisan Opioids Response Package

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After months of hearings and negotiations, lawmakers reached agreement on a bipartisan package to address prevention, treatment, research, and enforcement related to the misuse of and addiction to opioids. On October 3, 2018, the Senate voted 98-1 to pass a compromise opioids response package that includes key provisions to expand telehealth coverage and reimbursement. The House had previously passed the opioids agreement legislation, H.R. 6, "the Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment (SUPPORT) for Patients and Communities Act," on September 28, 2018. President Trump has stated that he will sign the opioids legislation into law shortly. [Update: President Trump signed the legislation on October 24, 2018.] Policymakers consider the legislative package to be an important step in expanding health care providers' ability to address opioids through increased access to treatment, in part by removing certain barriers to the use of telehealth.

The final agreement includes provisions to accelerate research to develop non-addictive painkiller alternatives, ease restrictions on which health professionals can prescribe medication-assisted treatment, and increase support for state prescription drug monitoring programs to prevent abuse. The bill also takes steps to prevent illicit opioids from reaching the U.S. through international mail, provides grants to a variety of substance abuse prevention programs, and expands telehealth coverage and reimbursement for substance abuse and behavioral health services. The final bill also allows Medicaid funding for individuals to seek treatment at an inpatient substance abuse facility with more than 16 beds. While the bill is considered to be a major step forward in addressing opioid abuse, further action is likely necessary.

If you have questions or would like further information regarding the content of this alert, please contact [Sheila Burke](#).