

PROTECTING VETERAN ACCESS TO TELEMEDICINE SERVICES ACT OF 2025

PURPOSE

The Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act of 2025 would allow health care professionals employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to prescribe medically necessary controlled substances to veterans via telemedicine under certain conditions regardless of whether that health care professional has conducted one in-person medical examination. This practice is currently allowed under a COVID-19 related exemption to the Ryan Haight Act, and the authority will expire on December 31, 2025.

BACKGROUND

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 went into effect on April 13, 2009. This bill was designed to combat rogue internet pharmacies that proliferated in the late 90s, selling controlled substances online.

- Under this Act, a practitioner is required to have conducted at least one in-person medical evaluation of the patient, in the physical presence of the practitioner, before issuing a prescription for a controlled substance.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, requirements under the Ryan Haight Act for a patient to meet with a practitioner in-person for the prescription of a controlled substance were temporarily waived.
- On November 19, 2024, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the continuation of temporary extension of flexibilities around telemedicine prescribing of controlled substances from the COVID-19 public health emergency through December 31, 2025.

VETERAN IMPACT

- Telehealth improves healthcare accessibility, convenience, and efficiency by enabling remote consultations, reducing the need for travel, and facilitating timely medical intervention.
- Due to lack of immediate access to VA clinics, more than 2.7 million veterans residing in rural areas have particular difficulty conducting the one in-person visit with their health care provider that is required under the Ryan Haight Act.
- Veterans residing in rural areas do not have the same access to VA healthcare as those in more suburban and urban areas, which can result in poor long-term health outcomes.
- If the current exemption expires at the end of the year, veteran access to certain medications classified as a controlled substance will be severely restricted.