

United States Senate

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VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of expanded telehealth access for veterans in Arizona and across the nation. The VA has been expanding telehealth capacity long before this pandemic, and I thank you for recognizing and acting on the need to further expand telehealth services across the country. I appreciate the VA's announcement in June 2020 about the national expansion of its tele-critical care program, and I ask that you work with me to ensure that all of Arizona's VA Medical Centers are equipped with tele-ICU technology.

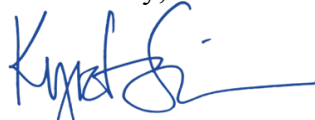
As you know, the VA health care system in Arizona covers many rural areas. These rural and geographically isolated communities often lack access to general clinicians and specialists. I am committed to ensuring that veterans living in these rural communities can easily access quality health care, and I appreciate the VA's ongoing willingness to work with my staff, Philips Healthcare, and the American Legion to bring a Project ATLAS (Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations) pod to northern Arizona. Once in place, the ATLAS pod will allow veterans to receive full-service telehealth consultations within their community.

New telehealth technologies can also improve the quality of care for veterans at VA Medical Centers. As the VA expands its tele-critical care program, the rapid adoption and expansion of telehealth access for veterans receiving treatment in intensive care units (tele-ICUs) will ensure that the care of critically ill veterans is monitored by board-certified clinicians and experienced critical care nurses. The Phoenix VA Medical Center benefits from this technology and has seen improved outcomes for its veterans. Through this collaboration, tele-ICU staff can monitor a patient's condition for stability and directly communicate with bedside staff in Phoenix to improve patient outcomes. Unfortunately, veterans treated at the Prescott and Tucson VA Medical Centers currently do not have access to this lifesaving technology.

As you expand the tele-critical care program, I hope to work with you to ensure that all Arizona veterans may benefit from this technology. As you finalize plans to expand the program, please provide my office with the timeline and plan for deployment of tele-ICU technology at the Arizona VA Medical Centers in Tucson and Prescott.

Thank you for your continued efforts to expand the VA's telehealth services. If you have additional questions, please contact Dr. Jackie Maffucci in my office at jackie_maffucci@hsgac.senate.gov or 202-224-2210.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kyrsten Sinema", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator