Chairman Roskam and Ranking Member Levin, on behalf of the American Academy of Dermatology Association (Academy), which represents more than 13,800 dermatologists nationwide, thank you for your leadership in convening the hearing on the “Innovation in Health Care.” The Academy is pleased to submit the following statement for the record.

The Academy is committed to excellence in the medical and surgical treatment of skin disease; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care to reduce the burden of disease. We applaud you for continuing to explore innovations in healthcare that can help advance the Medicare program and in turn increase its sustainability.

Telemedicine continues to be one of the innovative vehicles that will help improve access in the Medicare program. The Academy is encouraged by Congress’ action to take the initial step of expanding telemedicine services in Medicare Advantage plans passed as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-123). The ability to use telemedicine in current and future payment systems has the potential to expand the utilization of telemedicine by physicians to improve patient access through more coordination and collaboration. The Academy is a leader in telemedicine and has first-hand knowledge of the benefits that telemedicine can offer patients in gaining access to specialty care. Medicare beneficiaries in rural and underserved areas face many health challenges including, physician shortages and higher rates of chronic conditions; to address these challenges, the Academy supports two innovative telehealth programs that help increase access to this population.

AccessDerm

For nearly a decade, the Academy has had a specific mission to improve the dermatology care available to underserved populations in the United States by facilitating access to board-certified dermatologists in their state via an Academy sponsored telemedicine platform, AccessDerm. The AccessDerm program gives primary care providers, who work in participating free and rural clinics, and Indian Health Services Clinics on Native American Reservations, access to dermatologists’ expertise for a small fee.

In an effort to continue to improve the available technology, the Academy recently relaunched its AccessDerm program as a charitable care service. The Academy’s AccessDerm program now provides physicians treating underserved communities access to the dermatological expertise of Academy member dermatologists and residents in training at no charge. The program facilitates safe and secure provider-to-provider consults with a new easy to use teledermatology platform and application. The Academy and its AccessDerm program supports the appropriate use of teledermatology as a means of improving access to the expertise of board-certified dermatologists to provide high-quality, high-value care. In addition to expanding access to
dermatologic care, the program helps reduce wait times and unnecessary referrals for in-person visits and triages patients who need to see a dermatologist for an in-person visit right away.

As the program expands, the Academy is working collaboratively with national organizations such as the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) and the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) to pilot and expand the AccessDerm program. The Academy recognizes the important role that the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF) has played in improving access to care for patients through community health centers (CHCs) in urban, suburban and rural communities across the country. To that end, the Academy applauds Congress for the reauthorization of the CHCF with $7.8 billion dollars in funding for community health center program for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019 as passed in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-123). The Academy will pilot AccessDerm in several NACHC and NRHA member locations this year with hopes of expanding the program to additional centers in 2019 and beyond. These services have the opportunity to expand, and further build on the mission of CHCs by increasing access to specialty care for patients who might otherwise wait much longer to access the care and treatment they critically need.

**Project ECHO**

The Academy also supports Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes), an online learning collaborative model of medical education and care management. Through ECHO, primary care providers working in rural and underserved communities gain knowledge and support from specialty colleagues. Derm ECHO uses videoconferencing to link primary care providers with dermatologists to jointly manage complex skin diseases while promoting continued medical learning. Members of the Academy who participate in Project ECHO have seen its positive impact first hand. Dermatologists diagnose and treat more than 3,000 diseases including many chronic inflammatory, multi-system, disabling, and life-threatening conditions, and Project ECHO has helped increase primary care physicians' knowledge of dermatologic and other specialty conditions, while also increasing patients’ access to a larger network of specialists.

Finally, the Academy commends Congress for investing $600 million in rural broadband expansion as part of the FY 2018 Omnibus Spending Package. Reliable and secure internet access is vital to the expansion and sustainability of telemedicine in rural communities. The Academy encourages the committee to continue its work to expand broadband access. Access to broadband is imperative not only for the sustainability and expansion of AccessDerm and Project ECHO, but is the underlying support system necessary for the continued development of innovative technologies in health care.

Again, the Academy appreciates the Subcommittee holding this hearing, and the Subcommittee’s efforts to address the ongoing innovations in Health Care. The Academy remains ready to serve as a resource and looks forward to working with your committee to ensure that our patients can benefit from advances in telemedicine and technology, while preserving the highest standards of patient safety and efficacy. Please feel free to contact Michelle Mathy, the Academy’s Assistant Director, Political and Congressional Affairs, at mmathy@aad.org or (202) 609-6333 if you have any questions or if we can provide additional information.