COVID-19 and the App Ecosystem

In 2021, the global community is still struggling find balance and stillness in a turbulent environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic. While many Americans turned to apps and the internet to communicate, work, or monitor their health and wellness, small businesses in the app economy had to quickly pivot, often creating entirely new products to address these new demands.

Many App Association members have been working on the front lines to provide telehealth support and resources. Other members offered their services and expertise to businesses that needed to pivot to a digital presence, with many of these resources coming at no charge. For example:

MotionMobs, based in Birmingham, AL, created the state's contact tracing app using Bluetooth technology and a unified exposure notification application programming interface (API) created by Apple and Google.

Vēmos Nightlife, based in Minneapolis, MN, offered its platform and expertise to service industry members facing unemployment to generate additional income through online classes and events.

Particle Health, based in New York, NY, made its API for electronic medical records free to organizations and platforms screening for COVID-19.

Throughout the pandemic, Congress has heavily invested in the resiliency of small businesses and has granted flexibility for federal agencies to respond during the federal public health emergency (PHE). As the United States and global economy move closer to a post-pandemic world, this support is still integral.

To Support Small Businesses on the Front Lines We Urge Congress to:

- Build on recently enacted pandemic-specific broadband support funding to enable more federal, technology-neutral support for broadband deployment to low-income and rural Americans.

- Push federal agencies, including the Small Business Administration (SBA), to issue updated guidance, when appropriate, to help small businesses navigate pandemic programs like the Paycheck Protection Program and subsequent COVID-19 relief legislation.

- Authorize federal programs that support workforce development and broadband adoption programs, such as digital literacy, re-skilling, and computer science classes for students.

- ✅ Help improve the cybersecurity posture of small businesses by providing cybersecurity best practices and counseling resources through SBA.

- ✅ Continue to conduct rigorous oversight of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to implement the Broadband DATA Act and update its broadband access maps. Federal efforts to bridge the digital divide are only as good as the maps that show who has access and who doesn't.

- ✅ Pass measures like the **Telehealth Modernization Act (H.R. 1332/S. 368, 117th)** which would permanently sideline outdated statutory restrictions on the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' ability to cover telehealth services furnished to Medicare patients. Instead of kicking the can down the road and extending the PHE, Congress should enable all Medicare beneficiaries to access telehealth services from their provider regardless of where patients are located at the time of their appointment.