



NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (HIT) COALITION MEETING

October 7, 2020 | Meeting Summary

The National Rural Health Information Technology (HIT) Coalition is supported by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) and coordinated by the Technical Assistance & Services Center (TASC), a program of the National Rural Health Resource Center (The Center).

Participants:

- Tommy Barnhart, Ten Mile Enterprises and National Rural Health Association (NRHA)
- Denny Berens, Nebraska Times
- Sally Buck, Nicole Clement, Terry Hill, Tracy Morton, Andrew Naslund, Kate Stenehjem, National Rural Health Resource Center
- Jill Bullock, Arizona Center for Rural Health
- Steven Coubal, Stacey Lee, Johnson Memorial Health Services
- Scott Daniels, Hawaii State Office of Rural Health
- Stephen Day, Angelina Salazar, Western Healthcare Alliance (WHA)
- William England, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP)
- Freda Evans, Lake City Community Hospital
- Sebastian Gimenez, Allison Owen, Gretchen Ramirez, Maggie Sauer, North Carolina Office of Rural Health
- Gerard Jolley, Phillip Stringfield, National Association of Community Health Clinics (NACHC)
- Alana Knudson, Shena Papat, NORC at the University of Chicago
- Robyn McArdle, Allison Owen, Gretchen Ramirez, Maggie Sauer, North Carolina Office of Rural Health
- Mike McNeely, HRSA, FORHP, Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT)
- Neal Neuberger, HealthTech Strategies
- Toniann Richards, Health Care Collaborative of Rural Missouri
- Wendy Ross, South Central Telehealth Resource Center
- Angelina Salazar, Western Healthcare Alliance (WHA)
- Chris Salyers, National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health

(NOSORH)

- Becky Sanders, Indiana Rural Health Association
- Brock Slabach, National Rural Health Association (NRHA)
- Corey Smith, University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences
- Bill Sonterre, Stratis Health
- John Supplitt, American Hospital Association (AHA)
- Linda Weiss, National Cooperative of Health Networks (NCHN)
- Louis Wenzlow, Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC)
- John Windhausen, Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition
- Joe Wivoda, Analysts, Inc.

Update on State and Federal HIT and Telehealth Legislation and Regulations

Neal Neuberger, Health Tech Strategies

- The [Capital Hill Steering Committee on Pandemic Preparedness and Health Security](#), sponsored by the John Hopkins Center for Health Security held their [launch event](#) on October 7, 2020.
 - The committee hosts monthly events focused on lessons learned from responses to natural, man-made, and other complex health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and how to better mitigate and respond to future health crises.
 - The committee has four Honorary Senate Co-chairs: Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA), and Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), as well as three former federal public health leaders serving as Honorary Founding Members.
- COVID Funding
 - To date, there have been three COVID funding bills finalized. There have been allowances for new technologies to provide telehealth access and enforcement discretion for HIPAA rules apply. Other telehealth flexibilities include the removal of geography and originating site restrictions, the allowance for federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and rural health clinics (RHCs) to serve as originating sites and allowing telehealth providers to deliver services to both new and established patients.
 - Broadband: Federal Communications Commission (FCC) received and distributed \$200 million for COVID-19.
- Executive Order to Improve Access to Healthcare Across America
 - President Trump issued an [executive order on August 3rd, 2020](#) with the goal of improving health care in rural America, and for all

Americans, by expanding telehealth, modernizing regulations, and reforming payments. Specifically, the order called for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to:

- Propose a rule via the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to extend parts of Medicare's broader coverage of telehealth beyond the end of the current public health emergency (PHE).
 - Propose a payment model to improve rural health care through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI).
 - Launch a rural health action plan with a range of actions that different components of HHS will take to 1) build sustainable models for rural communities, 2) focus on preventing disease and mortality, 3) leverage innovation and technology, and 4) increase access to care.
 - Reach a memorandum of understanding with the FCC and the Department of Agriculture to promote rural access to telehealth via broadband.
- Waiver Exemptions Ending at the End of the Year
 - Many of the waivers and exemptions run out at the end of December unless they are individually extended. Organizations have started putting together long-term agendas for what could happen.
 - Rural advocacy groups are emphasizing practices that have been successful in order to make these permanent (i.e. remote patient monitoring)
 - It remains to be seen what will happen with these provisions but making permanent all of these flexibilities is not necessarily the way to go, especially concerning HIPAA and privacy and security.
 - The [PHE has been extended](#) again, now through January 20, 2021.
 - Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs)
 - The TRCs are working on a to develop a response plan that incorporates telemedicine and other technologies to assist rural communities and community hospitals in both preparing for, and responding to, current and future pandemics.
 - The Center for Telehealth and e-Health Law (CTEL) is launching a large-scale study to provide cost analysis data. The project will include a data dictionary and sample data set to standardize telehealth data from multiple sources for large-scale analysis.
 - Broadband
 - The FCC has reaffirmed and stood by their repeal of net neutrality rules. They have circulated [an order for consideration](#) to that addresses three points raised by the U.S. Court of Appeals that upheld the majority of the FCC's decision to repeal net neutrality.

Telehealth Updates

Mike McNeely, Director, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT)

William England, Senior Advisor, HRSA, FORHP

- OAT was reauthorized through the CARES Act which opens some new doors and made many more organizations eligible, including for-profit organizations for grant programs.
- The TRCs received an additional \$11.6 million in funding earlier this year to address COVID.
- Telehealth usage in 2016 was 0.25% of Medicare spending. This year March and April was about a 1400% increase. Telehealth continues to be used as a much higher clip, but less than earlier in the pandemic.
- Near the end of August a [memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#) between FCC, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and HHS commits them to interagency cooperation on telehealth and broadband issues. As part of the MOU, the agencies intend to establish an interagency Rural Telehealth Initiative Task Force comprised of representatives from each agency. This Task Force will regularly meet to consider future recommendations or guidelines for this effort and exchange agency expertise, scientific and technical information, data, and publications.
- Thirty [Telehealth Network Grant Program](#) awards were made for September 1, 2020. New this year, Georgia Health Policy Center will be providing technical assistance to these grantees.
- The Evidence-Based Tele-Behavioral Health Network Program is in its last year and will be recompeting. The Centers for Excellence (COEs) and the TRCs are also competitive.
- Funds for the Rural Telementoring Training Center were awarded to the University of Texas Health Science Center of San Antonio.
- Two telehealth research centers recently awarded:
 - [University of Iowa Rural Telehealth Research Center](#) is continuing their work with clinically informed and policy-relevant telehealth research.
 - University of Arkansas, a new research center is focused on conducting thorough and comprehensive evaluation of nationwide telehealth investments in rural areas and populations.
- FORHP
 - Two Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) for FORHP Community-Based Division for Fiscal Year 2021:
 - Applications for the [Rural Health Network Development Planning Program Grant](#) are due November 16th. The grant program

supports one year of planning to develop and assist integrated health care networks in becoming operational.

- Applications for the [Rural Health Care Services Outreach Program Grant](#) are due December 1st. Applicants are still required to have a network of three or more health care provider organizations using an evidence-based or promising practice model, but different to this year is along with the Regular Outreach Track that aims to provide 45 awards, the Healthy Rural Hometown Initiative (HRHI) aims to provide 15 awards.
 - FORHP's newest division, the *Strategic Initiatives Division* kicked off their [Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Implementation](#) projects with 90 awards. There are some upcoming competitive funding opportunities focusing on methamphetamine and another round of implementation funding.
- Other Discussion
 - Because of the pandemic, a lot of federal agencies have jumped into telehealth including Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (ARHQ), and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.
 - Looking for funding opportunities? A keyword search on grants.gov for telehealth will give many, many results.

Connected Health Initiative

Brian Scarpelli, The App Association

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has been extremely active in vaccine development and such, but they've also issued allowances for use of new technologies during the PHE. They've revised documentation that would've have been so easy to do in the past for various medical devices and software, for the duration of the PHE.
- On [September 22, 2020](#), the FDA launched the [Digital Health Center of Excellence \(DHCoE\)](#) within the Center for Devices and Radiological Health (CDRH). The purpose of the DHCoE is to [empower digital health stakeholders](#) to advance health care by fostering responsible and high-quality digital health innovation.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Connected Care Pilot and Rural Health Care Programs

John Windhausen, Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition

- [FCC Connected Care Pilot Program](#)

- It is anticipated that FCC will start accepting applications in November or December, but the full public notice hasn't been released yet. Funding will be \$100 million over the next three years. Interested parties do not have to be rural to apply and does not necessarily include devices. Guidance outlining eligibility determinations and requirement applicant information was released in September and can be viewed here: <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-provides-information-guidance-connected-care-pilot-program>
- [COVID-19 Telehealth Program](#):
 - Earlier this year, FCC received and distributed \$200 million in funding to help health care providers provide connected care services to patients at their homes or mobile locations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another \$200 million was included in a bill that passed in the house, moving on to the senate. There was a lot of demand for the funds, as the FCC received applications likely five times more than available funding.
- [FCC Rural Health Care Program](#)
 - FCC and the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) continue to be behind in processing applications for this program. There are apps from July 2019 that haven't been ruled on while July 2020 applications have now been submitted. USAC has committed to improving the application review process to within six months, but this will not be met in 2020.
 - Congressional Broadband Legislation: There is currently a number of competing bills.
 - There is some momentum behind the [Broadband Reform and Investment to Drive Growth in the Economy \(BRIDGE\) Act of 2020](#) that would provide \$30 billion in flexible funding to states and \$1 billion to tribal governments to deploy affordable, high-speed broadband in un- and underserved communities nationwide.
 - Sen. Clyburn sponsored the [Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act](#), which proposes \$100 billion for broadband infrastructure to expand affordable high-speed internet to all Americans.
 - SHLB continues to advocate for broadband for every hospital and clinic.

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