




Rural Veterans Health Access Program


Sponsored by the State of Alaska
Health Planning and Systems
Development

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Health


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The objective of the Rural Veterans Health Access Project (RVHAP) is to increase access to and quality of health care to veterans and other rural residents in South East Alaska through the development of a demonstration Tele-health network (TH) that:



Creates a network in SE
Alaska for the delivery of
behavioral and primary care
health services using Tele-
Health technology for
Veterans, their families and
other community members in
isolated rural areas and-

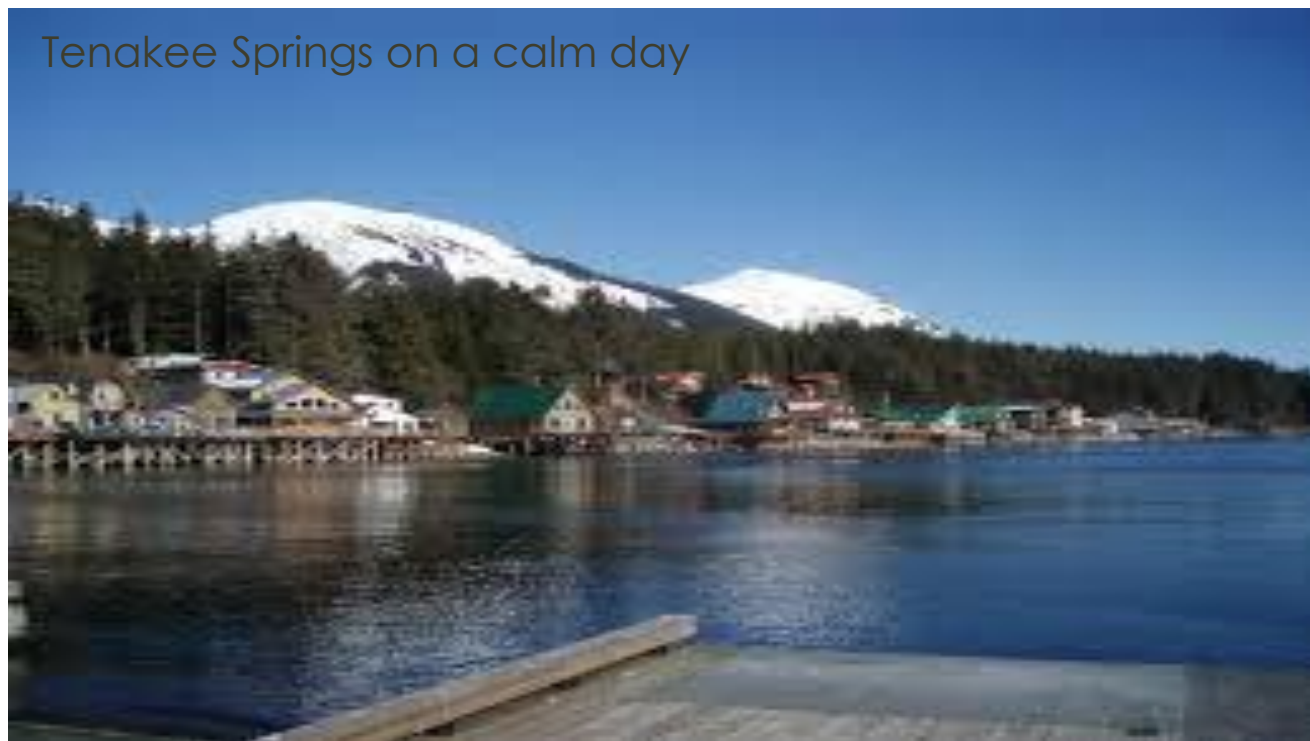


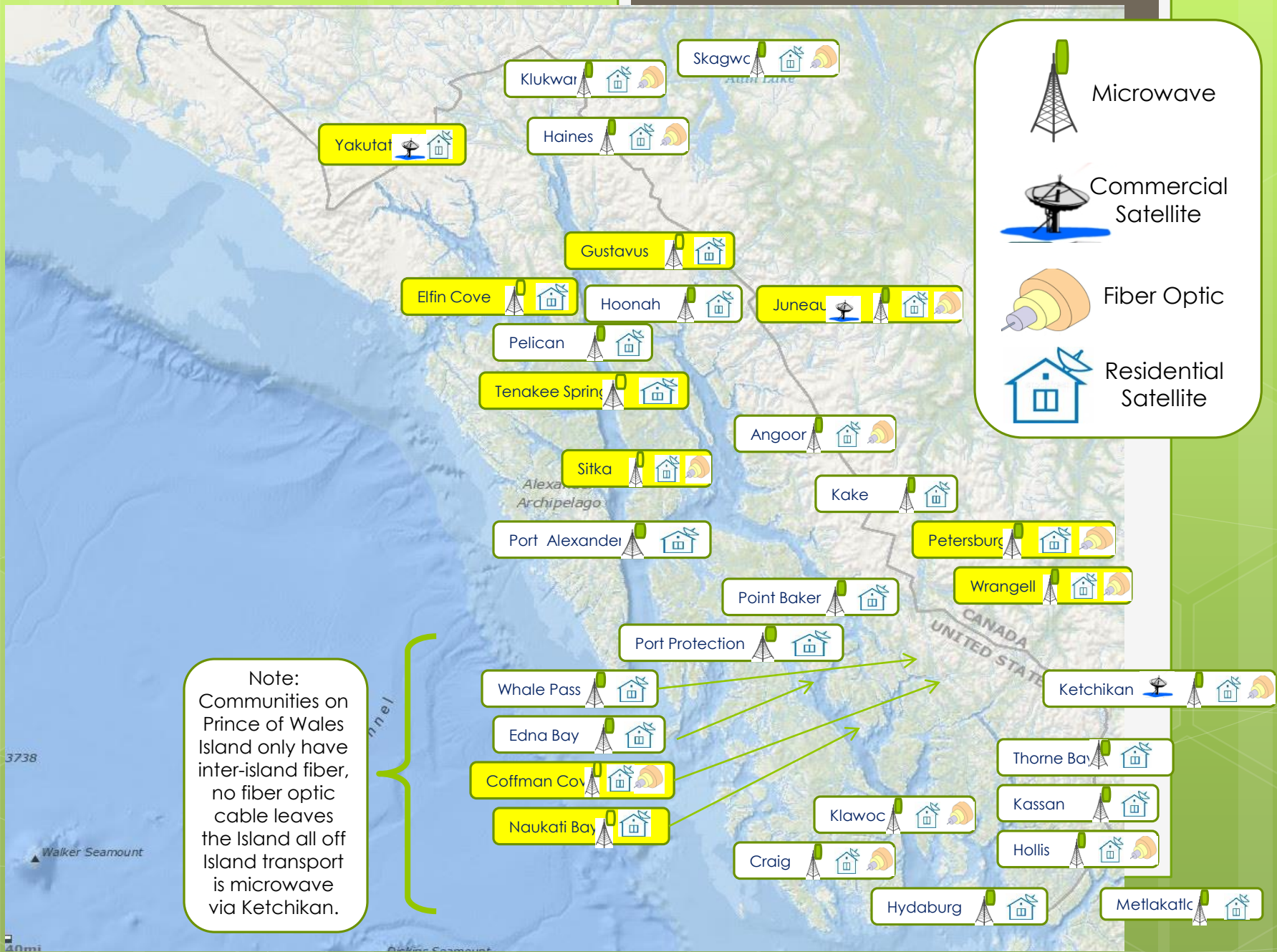
Works with the Alaska Veterans healthcare System (AVHS) to develop a network of Tele-Health services in SE Alaska with a non-tribal CHC: Alaska Island Community Services, a CMHC: Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc. and a CAH: Sitka Community Hospital

RVHAP and FLEX Connections

- RVHAP is helping to build regional systems of care
- Critical Access Hospitals are coming into the RVHAP program and it will expand to include more over time
- It is a way for Critical Access Hospitals to take advantage of the RVHAP tele-health infrastructure at a lower rate

Alaska's RVHAP is serving the
“most rural of rural communities”
Example of isolated rural service sites: Tenakee Springs -
Accessible only by Float Plane as are three other sites





Successes to Date

- Teleconnectivity for video-linked health consults established in six remote rural areas
- Telebehavioral health services and outreach for assistance with VA eligibility and benefit claims begun at five of the six sites and the new expansion to begin Spring 2015.
- Service expansion to primary care in three remote sites approved by HRSA and scheduled to commence Spring of 2015

Map of Alaska in size contrast to the Continental US

Alaska-Canada border: 1,538 miles long. East to West, it is 2,700 miles wide.

When a scale map of Alaska is superimposed on a map of the 48 lower states, Alaska extends from coast to coast.



- Alaska's 570,373 square miles is one-fifth the size of the continental U.S.
- Alaska is more than twice the size of Texas.
- It is larger than the combined area of the next three largest states: Texas, California, and Montana
- It is larger than the **combined** area of the 22 smallest U.S. states
- Without Alaska, Brazil and Australia are larger than the United States
- It is also larger than all but 18 sovereign countries

Successes to Date 2

- Building provider capacity:
 - On-line series of 23 1 Hour sessions: From the War Zone to the Home Front: Supporting the Mental Health of Veterans and Families through the Alaska Center for Rural Health-Area Health Education Center (ACRH-AHEC)
 - Training to Behavioral and Medical Health Care Providers on TBI at the Alaska Brain Injury Network Symposium
 - Collaboration between RVHAP network agency neuropsychologist who has the only rural practice in the state and the single Brain Injury Specialist physician in the state to develop a web-based providers' training on TBI in 2015.

Issues in creating this Rural Telehealth Delivery System

- Geographic isolation: Island locations without roads & other isolated communities with limited roads
- Communities' "back-haul" connectivity not in place- process takes approximately 6 months and involves applying for federal subsidies through a Federal program called the Universal Service Fund (USF) administered by the Universal Services Administrative Company (USAC) that subsidizes bandwidth to rural non-profit health centers.



Issues in creating this Rural Telehealth Delivery System

- Telecommunication capacity of other sites in most communities are less than RVHAP provider networks. The result is video conferencing services are often based at site although the VIDYO has capacity for connection with home computers, tablets and smart phones.
- Time and resources needed to recruit part-time site coordinators with needed skill sets in small communities.

Current and Planned Services

- Current: Telebehavioral Health services for veterans and community members in: Gustavas, Coffman Cove, Naukati Bay, Elfin Cove, Sitka and Tenakee Springs

Current and Planned Services 2

- Planned: Expansion of Telebehavioral Health to Yakutat clinic of Sitka Counseling and Prevention Center in 2015
- Yakutat site was already seeing veterans and community members with 3 week to monthly on-site visits from Sitka

Current and Planned Services 3

- Planned: Primary Care Telehealth expansion in 2015 to Gustavas, Coffman Cove, Naukati Bay, Sitka and Tenakee Springs
- Health Support service expansion for Petersburg Medical Center through partnership with Sitka Community Hospital providing smoking cessation, diabetes management, physical therapy exercise.

Examples of Services being provided preventing the need for air flights

- A patient recently released from an inpatient psychiatric facility elsewhere was in serious crisis and seen twice for counseling via Vidyo in an isolated site with clinicians in one of the hub agencies' location. These sessions prevented the need for a costly medivac flight and/or a suicide attempt. The client was stabilized and was able to pay for a scheduled air flight back to Juneau for further services on her own.
- A second community member accessed counseling services for approximately a month via the RVHAP Vidyo link and resolved their issues without having to leave the community for services.

Examples of Services being provided preventing the need for air flights

- A TBI patient will have his care coordinated through the RVHAP for telehealth links for outpatient rehabilitation Anchorage saving multiple trips.
- An elementary school-aged child being screened for mental health issues which saves airfare for them and at least one accompanying adult.

Examples of Services being provided preventing travel by auto

- Vidyo linked court ordered alcohol prevention training with an RVHAP counselor in Wrangell. This will save a two hour drive to the southern part of Prince of Wales Island to access these services. Due to the nature of the services provided having this individual off the road during the training decreases the risk of an alcohol-related traffic incidence.

Examples of Services being provided

- Neuropsychology services focused on TBI and PTSD provided for community members and Veterans by neuropsychologist, Dr. Cindy Westergaard. She sees Veterans and community members for in-person and telehealth sessions. As well she and Sitka Community Hospital staff support veterans enrollment for benefits

TBI/PTSD services at Sitka Community Hospital

- In person and Vidyo-linked assessment and treatment including computer-based TBI cognitive rehabilitation program.
- iRest self-calming, self-regulation sessions
- Training in TBI assessment and treatment for other RVHAP Clinicians
- Sharing training with Alaska VA clinical practitioners.

Key takeaways for other Flex Programs to consider incorporating from RVHAP Telehealth Pilot Program

- Improved care coordination: For example, Forming a Network of healthcare so patients can get higher level of care at a tertiary center while follow-up care can be provided in the local community
- Expertise can be extended beyond the hospital walls-through care and/or healthcare provider training

Key Takeaways 2

- Faster diagnosis of some conditions-skin conditions for example
- Can minimize healthcare costs while reducing patient travel time and time away from home and family
- Improves access to specialty care that might not be available otherwise

Contact Information

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