NATIONAL TELEHEALTH CONFERENCE

July 16, 2024

Telehealth.HHS.gov

HRSA Health Resources & Services Administration

National Telehealth Conference

July 2024

Summary Report

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Introduction

On July 16, 2024, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) hosted the National Telehealth Conference, the largest federal conference on telehealth issues. The meeting brought together public and private sector leaders to discuss best practices and the future of virtual care. Over 2,700 registrants had the opportunity to hear from HRSA Administrator Carole Johnson, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Andrea Palm, and telehealth experts on a variety of topics, including:

- Efforts to expand access to tele-behavioral health services through interstate licensure
- Implications of health policy to inform telehealth's future
- Opportunities for telehealth to expand access to services for underserved and low-income communities
- Health care innovations and future telehealth technologies
- Expansion of broadband connectivity and adoption of telehealth to improve health equity

This document provides a high-level summary of the conference by session. Resources and a full agenda can be found in Appendix A and B. All conference session recordings and slides can be accessed at https://www.hrsa.gov/telehealth/national-telehealth-conference and https://ruralhealthlink.org/national-telehealth-conference/.

Summary of Conference Proceedings

Increasing Access to Behavioral Health

The opening session about expanding behavioral health services through telehealth was moderated by HRSA Administrator Carole Johnson and included HHS Deputy Secretary Andrea Palm, Brian Philson, President of Board of Directors with the Association of Social Work Boards, and Janet Orwig, Executive Director of PSYPACT with the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards. Administrator Johnson and Deputy Secretary Palm announced the first-ever Licensure Portability Grant Program investment in a multi-state social worker licensure compact. The discussion also centered on the importance of responding to behavioral health and substance use disorder needs in the country, the opportunities that licensure compacts provide to support the behavioral health workforce; and the role that telehealth plays in expanding access to behavioral health care.

Session highlights:
- Improving access to behavioral health and substance use disorder services is an Administration priority through a focus on expanding services, integration of care, and supporting the workforce.
- The session highlighted federal investments and efforts to address licensure barriers, including through the first-ever Licensure Portability Grant Program investment in a multi-state social worker licensure compact. HHS also supports building and sustaining primary care, psychology, and podiatry compacts.
- State licensure compacts allow states to come together on a common approach to licensing health care providers, allowing providers to practice across state lines without having to apply for a license in each state.
- State licensure compacts have many benefits. For example, the psychology compact supports behavior health integration in primary care; and provides services to hard-to-reach populations (e.g., homeless populations; veterans; transitory populations such as college students and retirees; individuals with hearing limitations; and non-English speakers.)

Beyond Telehealth: Improving Access to Underserved Communities

In the *Beyond Telehealth* session, representatives from community organizations discussed strategies to increase access to telehealth services in underserved communities. The panelists represented American Telemedicine Association, National Rural Health Association, and National Association of Community Health Centers. A key theme of this session was the potential for telehealth to improve health equity by addressing community needs related to workforce shortages, transportation challenges, and access to specialists. Panelists discussed the benefits of telehealth for underserved communities, including utilization, telehealth policy, funding sources, and the evidence base.

Session highlights:
- An equity-first approach to telehealth can help ensure that it addresses and reduces health care disparities. Telehealth can decrease access challenges, such as those due to geographic location or physician shortage and reduce bias when accessing care.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being increasingly leveraged to reduce administrative burden and increase efficiency. However, it is important to consider the potential privacy and security risks associated with AI.
- Telehealth has demonstrated cost-effectiveness and high quality of care. Policies are needed to better integrate telehealth with in-person care. Policies should be informed by the evidence base.
- Telehealth is increasingly being used for specialty care. This is valuable for rural communities where access to specialty care is sparse. The improvements in technology make it more possible for various specialties to incorporate telehealth. However, care should be taken to avoid exacerbating inequities as new technologies can be expensive and inaccessible for under resourced communities.

Ensuring Access to Telehealth for Individuals with Low Income

In this session, panelists provided an overview of their HRSA grant-funded efforts to expand access to telehealth services, particularly for low-income individuals. Each panelist highlighted their service areas, patient population demographics, including top health concerns and most significant barriers to health care.

Panelists described the strategies for deploying telehealth to expand health services for underserved populations including justice-involved population, at-risk youth, uninsured patients, and patients in communities with limited health care access. Telehealth was a strategy to screen, assess and refer patients to the appropriate level and place for care, avoiding long travel and wait times for patients. Patients, in many instances, were able to be treated in their homes.

Session highlights:
- Panelists detailed scheduling and workflow approaches that help minimize inefficiencies and maximize flexibility to meet patients' needs.
- Panelists discussed the benefit of a patient navigator as part of the telehealth model. Patient navigators helped connect patients to telehealth appointments and provided follow-up support, linking patients to health information, social services and other supports.
- The panelists all mentioned the importance of targeted telehealth training for their providers and staff.
- Patient engagement can be improved by including patients in the design of telehealth workflows and listening to their preferences around appointment times and technology supports.

Health Care Innovation in Telehealth

This session explored federal efforts to advance telehealth technologies, focusing on Artificial Intelligence (AI), interoperability, and remote patient monitoring. Speakers from federal agencies shared insights about ongoing research, regulatory frameworks, and innovative applications aimed at enhancing telehealth services. Speakers emphasized the importance of collaboration, equity, and the integration of innovative technologies to improve health outcomes.

Session highlights:
- The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) highlighted their office priorities and activities.
- The National Institutes of Health (NIH) discussed their use of voice biomarkers for diagnosing disorders and their expansion of AI and machine learning in clinical care. NIH initiatives include creating a temporal atlas of pathogens, enhancing AI education for minority students, and funding AI "collaboratories" for early dementia detection.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) discussed its role in ensuring safe, effective digital health technologies and its commitment to health equity through initiatives like the Home as a Healthcare Hub program.
- The HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) covered the final rule implementing Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, focusing on mitigating discrimination risks in AI tools.
- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) highlighted regional integrated service networks, increased telehealth utilization, and potential AI applications for clinical diagnoses and risk assessment.

Evolving World of Federal Telehealth Policy

This session convened speakers from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Center for Medicare and Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services. The speakers discussed important federal policies that impact the telehealth policy landscape.

Session highlights:
- CMS is examining the impact of telehealth on access and quality of care.
- Without congressional action, starting January 1, 2025, statutory restrictions on geography, service site, and practitioner type will revert to pre-COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) condition policies. Consequently, people with Medicare will need to be in a rural area and in a medical facility to receive non-behavioral health services via Medicare telehealth.
- On July 10, 2024, CMS published the Calendar Year 2025 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule proposed rule. This year's proposal retains important, but limited, flexibilities and reflects CMS's goal to maintain and expand the scope of and access to telehealth services.
- States determine their own unique state Medicaid program within broad federal guidelines. States can choose between a variety of optional services. The federal government does mandate a certain level of mandatory services but, in general, states have a lot of flexibility within broad federal guidelines.

Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services

This session focused on expanding access to telehealth and broadband services. The presenters shared key information on the limited broadband service in rural communities.

Session highlights:
- The Telehealth Broadband Pilot program addressed broadband connectivity in Alaska, Michigan, Texas, and West Virginia. RADAR pods have been deployed resulting in 4,592,829 tests in the four states and 25 counties. Limited broadband is a concern in rural communities. It impacts individuals and businesses and perpetuates health disparities in rural regions. As a result of the pilot project, there will be a website with a broadband toolkit for rural communities.
- The Alaska Broadband Digital Equity Plan demonstrates that a significant portion of Alaska has slow or no broadband connectivity. Alaskans struggle to use telehealth technology. This limited broadband is impacting access to health care, emergency response, education, and social connectedness. The broadband network, which consists of multidisciplinary partners, is educating stakeholders to improve connectivity.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) shared two grant programs focused on increasing access to rural health care via telehealth. The Telecom Program provides a subsidy to bring rural rates on par with urban rates, which are typically lower. The Healthcare Connect Fund Program provides a 65% discount on charges for broadband networks. The FCC is focused on quality and seeks feedback from grantees on program improvements.
- Limited broadband connectivity creates an inability to access telehealth services. There are efforts underway to determine priority areas for broadband expansion. Additionally, there are funding opportunities from the federal government to encourage providers to engage in telehealth services and to assist providers in addressing cost barriers for broadband connection.

Appendix A: Conference Resources

Increasing Access to Behavioral Health
- Association of Social Work Boards: https://www.aswb.org/
- Health Resources and Services Administration: https://www.hrsa.gov/
- Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact: https://psypact.org/
- Telehealth.HHS.gov: https://telehealth.hhs.gov/

Beyond Telehealth: Improving Access to Underserved Communities
- American Telemedicine Association: https://www.americantelemed.org/
- National Association of Community Health Centers: https://www.nachc.org/
  - Environmental Scan of Telehealth Technical Assistance Resources: https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/details/?id=4123
  - Equity Office Hours: Bridging the Digital Divide: https://www.nachc.org/resource/telehealth-office-hour-bridging-the-digital-divide/
  - Telehealth Resources - https://www.nachc.org/topic/telehealth/
  - Telehealth Billing: https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/details/?id=4205
  - Telehealth Documentation: https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/details/?id=4204
  - Telehealth Learning Bundle - https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/telehealth-learning-bundle/
  - Telehealth Reimbursement Tips: https://www.nachc.org/resource/telehealth-reimbursement/
- National Rural Health Association: https://www.ruralhealth.us/

Ensuring Access to Telehealth for Individuals with Low Income
- Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance: https://brtava.org/
- Jessie Trice Community Health System: https://www.jtchs.org/
- National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers: https://telehealthresourcecenter.org/
- University of Maryland Medical System: https://www.umms.org/

Health Care Innovation in Telehealth
- National Institutes of Health: https://www.nih.gov/
  - Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning Consortium to Advance Health Equity and Researcher Diversity Program: https://www.aim-ahead.net/
  - Artificial Intelligence and Technology Collaboratories: https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/dbsr/artificial-intelligence-and-technology-collaboratories-aging-research
  - Bridge to Artificial Intelligence Program: https://commonfund.nih.gov/bridge2ai

- Smart Health and Biomedical Research in the Era of Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Data Science: https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/smart-health-biomedical-research-era-artificial
- Office for Civil Rights: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html
  - Section 1557 Final Rule: https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/section-1557/index.html
- Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology: https://www.healthit.gov/
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: https://www.va.gov/
  - VHA Connected Care: https://connectedcare.va.gov/
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: https://www.fda.gov/
  - FDA Digital Health: https://www.fda.gov/digitalhealth
  - Digital Health Center of Excellence: https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/digital-health-center-excellence

Evolving World of Federal Telehealth Policy
- Center for Connected Health Policy: https://www.cchpca.org/
- CMS Medicare Telehealth: https://www.cms.gov/medicare/coverage/telehealth/
- CMS Medicaid Telehealth: https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/telehealth/index.html
- CMS State Medicaid & CHIP Telehealth Toolkit: https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/telehealth/index.html
- CMS Calendar Year 2025 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Proposed Rule: https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2024-14828/medicare-and-medicaid-programs-calendar-year-2025-payment-policies-under-the-physician-fee-schedule
- Telehealth Resource Centers: https://telehealthresourcecenter.org/

Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services
- Alaska Public Interest Group: https://www.akpirg.org/
- Federal Communications Commission: https://www.fcc.gov/
  - Rural Health Care Program: https://www.fcc.gov/general/rural-health-care-program
  - Telecommunications Program: https://www.usac.org/rural-health-care/telecommunications-program/
  - Healthcare Connect Fund Program: https://www.usac.org/rural-health-care/healthcare-connect-fund-program/
- National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center: https://telehealthtechnology.org/
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences: https://www.uams.edu/
  - Rural Telehealth Evaluation Center: https://idhi.uams.edu/rtec/

Appendix B: Conference Agenda

September 16, 2024 – 9:15am – 5:00pm ET

Time	Session	Moderators/Speakers
9:15 – 9:30 am	**Welcome from Congressional Members** Watch recordings from congressional members showing their support for improving access to health care through telehealth.	U.S. Senator Tina Smith U.S. Representative Doris Matsui U.S. Representative Carol Miller U.S. Representative Buddy Carter U.S. Representative Mike Thompson
9:30 – 9:45 am	**Opening Remarks** HRSA will welcome attendees, discuss telehealth priorities, and share stakeholder support.	CAPT Heather Dimeris, MS, RD Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, Health Resources and Services Administration
9:45 – 10:30 am	**Increasing Access to Behavioral Health** Leaders from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' and stakeholder organizations will highlight key efforts on expanding access to behavioral health services and interstate licensure to expand access to behavioral health care using telehealth.	Moderator: Carole Johnson Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration Andrea Palm Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Brian Philson, MSW, LMSW, ACSW President of Board of Directors, Association of Social Work Boards Janet Orwig, MBA, CAE Executive Director of PSYPACT, Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards
10:30 – 10:45 am	Break	
10:45 – 11:45 am	**Beyond Telehealth: Improving Access to Underserved Communities** Experts will discuss the key telehealth issues and priorities identified by their stakeholders to increase access to health care through telehealth technology for	Moderator: Helen Burstin, MD, MPH, MACP Council of Medical Specialty Societies Ann Mond Johnson, MBA, MHA

	underserved populations.	American Telemedicine Association Alan Morgan, MPA National Rural Health Association Julia Skapik, MD, MPH, FAMIA National Association of Community Health Centers
11:45am – 12:45 pm	**Ensuring Access to Telehealth for Individuals with Low Income** This session will provide an overview of efforts to equitably improve access to telehealth, particularly for low-income individuals. Health equity is a key component to the delivery of telehealth services.	Moderator: Kathy Wibberly, PhD Regional Telehealth Resource Center Mary Ochsner, MS, LPC, CRC, BC-TMH Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance Joycelyn Lawrence, MD Jessie Trice Community Health System Anthony Roggio, MD University of Maryland
12:45 – 1:15 pm	Lunch Break	
1:15 – 2:15 pm	**Health Care Innovation in Telehealth** This session will discuss Federal efforts for the future of telehealth technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), interoperability, and remote patient monitoring.	Moderator: Steve Posnack, M.S. Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology Susan Gregurick, PhD National Institutes of Health Matthew Diamond, MD, PhD Food and Drug Administration Daniel Shieh Office for Civil Rights Reena Duseja, MD, MS U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
2:15 – 3:15 pm	**Evolving World of Federal Telehealth Policy** Experts will highlight key policy efforts to expand access to telehealth services.	Moderator: Mei Kwong, JD National Telehealth Policy Resource Center Doug Jacobs, MD, MPH Chief Transformation Officer Center for Medicare Centers for Medicare & Medicaid

		Services
		Kris Corwin Center for Medicare, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
		Sheri Gaskins Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
3:15 – 3:30 pm	Break	
3:30 – 4:30 pm	**Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services** Experts will share the importance of addressing broadband to improve access to telehealth, particularly for rural communities. Discussion will include considerations for audio-only telehealth.	Moderator: Jordan Berg National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center Brittany Woods-Orrison Alaska Public Interest Group Chris Charlton, BSEE, PE, CPI University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Philip Bonomo Federal Communications Commission
4:30 – 5:00 pm	**Closing Remarks** HRSA will discuss conference highlights and key telehealth learnings.	CAPT Heather Dimeris, MS, RD Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, Health Resources and Services Administration