

Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Partnerships

Shane Rogers
Designated Federal Official

May 20, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chair, Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and
Commerce
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Secretary Becerra, Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairman Pallone, and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

The Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages (ACICBL) would like to inform you of its support for the use of Low Earth Orbiting Satellites (LEOS) to improve the health of rural and frontier communities.

On behalf of the ACICBL, I am writing to recognize the immediate need for telehealth services in rural, frontier, underserved and other overlooked communities across the nation and recommend opportunities to address the diverse needs of each of these communities. During the current pandemic, while expanded telehealth services have resulted in improved quality and cost of care, challenges in accessing telehealth services have magnified disparities in health outcomes and significantly impacted the ability of community healthcare facilities to deliver quality services to those communities with the highest rates of disparity. The healthcare workforce generally lacks the knowledge and expertise to navigate these recent technological leaps and requires training and preparation in order to be prepared for what awaits them. In addition, patients, families, and caregivers are key members of the interprofessional team and the digital divide has also impacted them in regards to the knowledge gap noted above as well as access to the essential services provided through technology.

As a Federal advisory committee, the ACICBL provides advice and recommendations concerning policy, program development, and other matters of significance related to interdisciplinary, community-based training grant programs authorized under Title VII, Part D, Sections 750–759, of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act. These programs work to enhance access to high-quality, culturally competent care for rural and other medically underserved communities and populations through a focus on training and interprofessional education and practice.

The delivery of affordable broadband connectivity for remote telehealth services can be described in terms of distance to the global fiber network. In frontier communities, the capital, operating, and maintenance costs of installing and maintaining terrestrial connectivity over long distances (sometimes in excess of hundreds of miles) to customer premises remains prohibitively high. In rural communities, while the distance to fiber-based communication has been somewhat reduced, the cost of achieving the ‘last mile’ of connectivity to customer premises continues to be excessively high and the cost of operating these facilities on any sustainable basis is prohibitive. Because of these challenges, community health facilities are stymied in their delivery of quality telehealth services to these overlooked or underserved communities due to the lack of available, adequate, and affordable broadband services.

Until recently, the use of satellite-based telehealth services remained challenged by technical delays and latency issues. However, ACICBL members recently learned that the impending implementation of LEOS-based connectivity now represents a viable and affordable option for the delivery of telehealth services to frontier, rural, and other underserved and overlooked communities across the nation. Recent advances in LEOS technology can now effectively reduce latency issues and deliver quality broadband services directly to the customer, regardless of their location on the planet.

Simply put, the nation is on the verge of providing quality broadband internet services to the most rural and frontier areas of the country and we need to ensure the current and future healthcare workforce is trained and prepared to ‘hit the ground running’ when this occurs. As such, the ACICBL has produced the following recommendations:

- ACICBL recommends supporting the use LEOS-based technology to support the delivery of telehealth services.
- ACICBL recommends programs authorized under Title VII, Part D, Sections 750–759 of the PHS Act, begin efforts to prepare their trainees in the effective use of this new technology.
- ACICBL recommends programs authorized under Title VII, Part D, Sections 750–759 of the PHS Act, allow current and future award recipients to purchase the necessary equipment to develop and expand telehealth services to be delivered via LEOS technology.

The members of the ACICBL can provide additional information or clarification needed on these recommendations. We are deeply committed to working with you to enhance the productivity of the programs under the Committee’s purview and to protect and improve the health of the nation, especially in rural, frontier, tribal, and other underserved areas. We greatly appreciate your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

/s/ Nicole Brandt

Nicole Brandt

Chair, Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages