

NATIONAL TELEHEALTH CONFERENCE

September 12, 2023



Telehealth.HHS.gov

HRSA
Health Resources & Services Administration

National Telehealth Conference

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Summary Report

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Introduction

On September 12, 2023, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) hosted the National Telehealth Conference to bring public and private sector leaders together to discuss telehealth best practices and examined the importance of integrating telehealth into standard care. Over 3,000 registrants had the opportunity to hear from HRSA Administrator Carole Johnson and CMS Deputy Administrator and Director of the Center for Medicare, Meena Seshamani, along with telehealth experts on a variety of topics, including:

- The adoption of telehealth and expansion of broadband connectivity to improve health equity
- Using tele-behavioral health as a successful model for integrating telehealth into the standard of care
- Telehealth's role in supporting the health care workforce and expanding services for patients
- Implications of health policy to inform telehealth's future in an evolving health care environment

This document provides a high-level summary of the conference by session. Information on resources as well as the 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

Leading the Way in Telehealth

This opening plenary session included a fireside chat with U.S Department of Health and Human Services leaders from the Health Resources and Services (HRSA) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Carole Johnson, HRSA Administrator, mentioned the overwhelming response to last year's conference which focused on the role telehealth is playing in improving access to health care services. Administrator Johnson informed participants that this year's conference will focus on the current state of telehealth, what has been learned, and where the field of telehealth is headed next.

Dr. Seshamani, a John Hopkins-trained surgeon and Oxford-trained economist who previously led health care and delivery system reform, is the Deputy Administrator and Director for the Center for Medicare at CMS. Dr. Seshamani's work is aligned with HRSA's efforts to serve underserved and rural populations. Both leaders echoed the importance of the partnership between the two federal agencies.

Session Highlights:

- CMS priorities include improving access to care, addressing health disparities, and applying innovation to improve health outcomes and reduce hospitalization.
- Dr. Seshamani touched on current efforts of Medicare which resulted in the provision of telehealth services including permanent expansion of telehealth for behavioral health needs and more broadly, a temporary expansion of many Medicare telehealth flexibilities through December 31, 2024 that were originated during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- To support health care policy reform, participants were encouraged to comment on CMS rules. Dr. Seshamani also mentioned data collection and analysis related to telehealth utilization as ways to guide Medicare as they move forward.

Beyond Telehealth: Improving Access to Underserved Communities

This session provided an opportunity for representatives from community organizations to engage in a conversation around strategies to increase access to telehealth services in underserved communities. The panelists represented the Advocates for Community Health, American Telemedicine Association, Consumer Technology Association, and the National Rural Health Association. 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, access to specialists, access to broadband services, and patient engagement. Panelists discussed the benefits of telehealth, challenges around accessing telehealth, disparities in telehealth use, patient and provider satisfaction, return on investment, and the future of telehealth.

Session Highlights:

- Telehealth and technology-enabled care are essential components in addressing social determinants of health. Telehealth ensures continuity of care and access to specialists for rural patients, has the potential to improve patient engagement and access to health information, and addresses transportation barriers patients may experience.
- Looking ahead, the parallel trends of workforce shortages and an aging population will make telehealth essential to meeting the needs of consumers. Telehealth has already been a useful tool in attracting providers to high-need areas and providing services in specialties, like behavioral health, which are experiencing workforce shortages.
- Across the health care ecosystem, there has been an erosion of trust, which impacts use of telehealth services as well as other health care services. This will require nurses, clinicians, and other trusted community members to work closely with the community. It is important to bring underserved groups into the conversation and prioritize access to care in underserved areas.
- All panelists identified coverage and reimbursement as the primary barrier to implementing telehealth. Additional barriers include patient access to technology, broadband access, and the user experience.
- When considering return on investment (ROI), telehealth has proven to be effective from a quality perspective, but there is also evidence on telehealth's potential for cost savings. To fully realize telehealth's potential for ROI, innovation must be encouraged, and there needs to be increased access to telehealth technologies in low-income communities that have a high potential to benefit.
- Looking forward, there is a need to increase communication across the health care ecosystem to exchange ideas and address issues facing underserved communities. There is potential for technological innovations to improve health care delivery, but without improving the current system, it will likely exacerbate current health disparities.

Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services

This session convened representatives from federal agencies to highlight efforts and resources to improve access to broadband nationally. A key theme of this session was the importance of broadband to expanded delivery of telehealth services, improving access to care for populations, and its role in addressing social determinants of health. Panelists discussed the various initiatives and coordination across federal agencies related to broadband expansion, connecting the underserved and unserved to resources and services, and efforts to bridge the digital divide.

Session Highlights:

- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) discussed efforts to increase connectivity and access to telehealth through investment in programs that expand the reach of rural, non-profit, and public health care providers (e.g., Rural Health Care Program); extend care beyond the “brick-and-mortar” health care system into the community (e.g., Connected Care Pilot Program); and connect low-income households to high-speed internet (e.g., Affordable Connectivity Program).
- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) provided an overview of the \$65 billion “Internet for All” initiative funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. NTIA administered programs under this initiative focused on building infrastructure and increasing internet adoption, addressing gaps to advance digital equity, expanding connectivity on tribal lands, and expanding middle-mile infrastructure.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided an overview of their efforts to support broadband and telehealth through USDA’s Rural Development programs that provide direct loans, grants, and technical assistance to support rural communities. Rural Development programs invest in the construction and expansion of broadband, rural health workforce development, development and improvement of essential community services and facilities, and support for rural business development.
- Panelists discussed broadband and high-speed internet access as a social determinant of health, even as a “super determinant” of health given its significant impact and connection to outcomes across numerous other areas including education, employment, and health care.
- Given the scale of efforts nationally around broadband, federal agencies, and other stakeholders are prioritizing collaboration and coordination, including community engagement, to ensure broadband is reaching those areas in most need.
- There is continued support for broader efforts, policies, and investments that focus on addressing digital equity and bridging the digital divide for those communities and populations that are underserved or unserved.

Using Telehealth to Strengthen the Health Care Workforce

This session brought together representatives from HRSA grant programs to discuss strategies used to strengthen the healthcare workforce through telehealth.

Session Highlights:

- HRSA's Telehealth Resource Centers are located around the country with twelve regional centers and two national centers focused on telehealth technology and telehealth policy. Telehealth Resource Centers provide consultation, resources, and technical assistance to health care systems and providers.
- The Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP) is using telehealth to expand mental health care services by providing teleconsultation, training, technical assistance, and care coordination for primary care practices.
- The University of Kansas Medical Center offers clinical services, training, student prevention services, and family support. They have a broad concept of the workforce which includes everyone impacting the health of a child (e.g., school nurses, school counselors, psychologists, special education teachers, para-teachers, and school-based community health workers).
- The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) represents the 70-state medical and osteopathic boards in the country. FSMB supports licensure portability to allow the health care workforce to practice in multiple jurisdictions and provide telehealth services across state lines. Interstate compacts are one form of licensure portability and can help with the facilitation of multiple practices, improve access to specialty care, and preserve a state's authority over the licensing process. Most states have adopted at least one compact and 35 states have adopted three or more. The Physician Assistant (PA) Compact is the newest compact.

Telehealth's Role in Behavioral Health Access and Outcomes

The session convened a panel of speakers working within the behavioral health care system to discuss telebehavioral health, including opportunities for improving access and outcomes, challenges with implementation, and successful interventions.

Session Highlights:

- The Indian Health Services (IHS) shared the unique challenges facing American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations including high rates of poverty, remote locations that make it difficult to access specialty care, and high health disparities, particularly around behavioral health. Telehealth can improve access and overall health of patients and there is a desire to expand telehealth services for AI/AN populations. Looking forward, it will be necessary to improve broadband access, increase standardization across regional programs, expand provider types, and improve technology and outreach efforts.
- Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance provided an overview of various programs implemented by the consortium, which includes geriatric behavioral health in nursing homes, school-based behavioral telehealth, and substance use disorder treatment programs. Opportunities for improving access to these programs include addressing broadband limitations, transportation challenges, workforce capacity, and disparities in telehealth use.
- The Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) explained the process for adoption and implementation of an interstate compact, Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT), that regulates telepsychology and temporary in-person, face-to-face practice of psychology. This allows psychologists to easily practice across states, which benefits patients and providers. They are currently in the process of creating a PSYPACT directory to match patients with the appropriate providers.
- Areas for strengthening the behavioral health workforce include retaining providers and providing flexible work arrangements, implementing team-based care models, and increasing available providers through interstate compacts.

Telehealth Trends and Research

This session convened a panel of speakers from across federal agencies to discuss telehealth research priorities, projects, findings, and the ways that this work builds the evidence-base for telehealth and its application and integration into the standard of care. A wide range of research was shared by panelists touching on areas related to telehealth effectiveness, quality, outcomes, and cost.

Session Highlights:

- The Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) highlighted key programs and resources supported by the office to build the evidence base for telehealth. This included an overview of the Telehealth Centers of Excellence and Telehealth Research Center Programs. The [Telehealth.HHS.gov](https://www.Telehealth.HHS.gov) site is a federal hub for telehealth information, research, and other resources.
- The National Institutes of Health (NIH) provided an overview of the wide range of telehealth research taking place across its various institutes. Areas of telehealth research include cancer care, mental health, substance use disorders, oral health, and clinical decision-making among many others.
- Panelists from HHS Office of the Assistance Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) presented research on Medicare telehealth flexibilities and trends during the pandemic; a demonstration of and sample results from the Medicare Telehealth Trends Dashboard; and findings on telebehavioral health and telerehabilitation.
 - The Medicare Telehealth Trends Dashboard is a publicly available tool that allows researchers, policymakers, and others to study telehealth Medicare data to inform policy, programs, and services.
 - There was a significant increase in telebehavioral health services during the pandemic with a drop in in-person services. Telebehavioral health services increased for children across all racial and ethnic groups during the pandemic, but were still lower for Black, Hispanic, and Asian children compared with White children. The most common conditions for these children were ADHD, trauma and stressor-related disorders, depression, anxiety, and behavior disorders.
 - Telehealth rates are lower now compared with during the pandemic but there is continued interest in Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) telehealth among primary care and behavioral health.
- The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) provided an overview of their agency's research priorities which include a focus on engaging and empowering patients; optimizing care delivery for clinicians; and supporting health systems in advancing care delivery. AHRQ examines many types of data (clinical, contextual, patient-generated, etc.) to support its mission to ensure evidence is understood and used or applied. Current and future telehealth research focuses on implementation, design, and workflows; behavioral health; application for complex conditions (e.g., cancer); and artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) tools and decision supports.

Appendix A: Conference Resources

Leading the Way in Telehealth

- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services: <https://www.cms.gov/>
- Health Resources and Services Administration: <https://www.hrsa.gov/>

Beyond Telehealth: Improving Access to Underserved Communities

- Advocates for Community Health: <https://advocatesforcommunityhealth.org/>
- American Telemedicine Association: <http://www.americantelemed.org/>
- Consumer Technology Association: <https://www.cta.tech/>
- National Rural Health Association: <https://www.ruralhealth.us/>

Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services

- FCC Affordable Connectivity Program: <https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/>
- FCC Connected Care Pilot Program: <https://www.fcc.gov/wireline-competition/telecommunications-access-policy-division/connected-care-pilot-program>
- FCC Lifeline Program: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>
- FCC Rural Health Care Program: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/rural-health-care-program>
- NTIA Broadband USA: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/>
- NTIA Internet for All: <https://www.internetforall.gov/>
- NTIA Launches Updated Federal Broadband Funding Guide: <https://ntia.gov/blog/2022/ntia-launches-updated-federal-broadband-funding-guide>
- NTIA State Broadband Programs & Contacts: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/states>
- NTIA Submit Questions/Comments: InternetForAll@ntia.gov
- USDA Community Facilities Program - <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities>
- USDA Business & Industry Loan Guarantees - <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/business-industry-loan-guarantees>
- USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Programs - <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants>
- USDA Rural Data Gateway - <https://www.rd.usda.gov/rural-data-gateway>
- USDA Rural Development: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/>
- USDA Rural Development Priorities: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points>
- USDA Rural Partners Network - <https://www.rural.gov/>

Using Telehealth to Strengthen the Health Care Workforce

- FSMB Resources:
 - Interstate Medical Licensure Compact: <https://www.imlcc.org/>
 - PA Compact Toolkit: <https://www.pacompact.org/compact-toolkit/>
 - Provider Bridge: <https://www.providerbridge.org/>
- National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers: <https://telehealthresourcecenter.org/>
- Telehealth ROCKS Resources: <https://www.telehealthrocks.org/resources>

- VMAP Guidebook: <https://vmap.org/guidebook/>

Telehealth's Role in Behavioral Health Access and Outcomes

- ASPPB Resources:
 - PSYPACT: www.psypact.org
 - Multi-Discipline Licensure Resource Project: <https://licensureproject.org/>
- Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance Study Resources
 - Geriatric Behavioral Health: <https://www.hfma.org/technology/telemedicine/59161/>
 - School Based Behavioral Telehealth: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35195293/>
- Counseling Compact: <https://counselingcompact.org/>
- IHS Telehealth Listserv: https://www.ihs.gov/listserv/topics/signup/?list_id=196
- IHS Telehealth Website: <https://www.ihs.gov/telehealth/>
- SAMHSA Report on Telehealth for the Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders: <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/ebp/telehealth-treatment-serious-mental-illness-substance-use-disorders>

Telehealth Trends and Research

- AHRQ Research and Resources:
 - EPC Program (for Latest Evidence Reviews): <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/products>
 - Funding Opportunities: <https://digital.ahrq.gov/ahrq-digital-healthcare-research-funding-opportunities>
 - Funded Projects: <https://digital.ahrq.gov/ahrq-funded-projects/search>
- ASPE Resources:
 - Medicare Telehealth Trends Dashboard: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/medicare-dashboard>
- NIH Resources:
 - NIH Reporter (funded grants): <https://report.nih.gov/>
 - Research funding opportunities - <https://grants.nih.gov/funding/index.htm> (type telehealth, telemedicine, or mobile health in the search box)
- OAT Resources:
 - OAT Announcements: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USHHSHRSA/signup/37188>
 - Office for the Advancement of Telehealth: <https://www.hrsa.gov/telehealth>
 - Telehealth.HHS.gov - <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/>
 - Telehealth COEs - <https://telehealthcoe.org/>
 - Telehealth Resource Centers: <https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/>
- Office of the National Coordinator Report on Artificial Intelligence for Health and Health Care: https://www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/jsr-17-task-002_aiforhealthandhealthcare12122017.pdf

Appendix B: Conference Agenda

September 12, 2023 – 9:00am – 4:30pm ET

Time	Session	Speakers
9:00 – 9:30 am	Welcome and Opening Remarks	CAPT Heather Dimeris, MS, RD, Director, Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, Health Resources and Services Administration
9:30 – 10:00 am	Leading the Way in Telehealth Leaders from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will highlight key efforts to expand access to telehealth services, especially as it relates to health equity. Moderator: Carole Johnson, Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration	Meena Seshamani, MD, PhD, Deputy Administrator and Director, Center for Medicare, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
10:00 – 10:15 am	Break	
10:15 – 11:15 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 underserved populations. Moderator: Ann Mond Johnson, MBA, MHA, American Telemedicine Association	René Quashie, JD Consumer Technology Association Amanda Pears Kelly Advocates for Community Health Alan Morgan, MPA National Rural Health Association
11:15 am – 12:15pm	Improving Access to Telehealth and Broadband Services This session will provide an overview of federal efforts and resources to improve access to broadband and address infrastructure issues, particularly for rural communities. Broadband is a key component to the delivery of telehealth services. Moderator: Commissioner Brendan Carr, JD, Federal Communications Commission	Bryan Boyle Federal Communications Commission Mark Colon, JD National Telecommunications & Information Administration Kellie Kubena U.S. Department of Agriculture
12:15 – 12:45 pm	Lunch	

<p>12:45 – 1:45 pm</p>	<p>Using Telehealth to Strengthen the Health Care Workforce</p> <p>This session will discuss the importance of telehealth in strengthening the health care workforce. Experts will share current efforts to assist providers in using telehealth and considerations for training the workforce for tomorrow.</p> <p>Moderator: Jonathan Neufeld, PhD, Great Plains Telehealth Resource and Assistance Center</p>	<p>Sandy Chung MD, FAAP, FACHE Virginia Mental Health Access Program</p> <p>Robert Stiles, MA, MPH University of Kansas Medical Center</p> <p>Lisa Robin, MLA Federation of State Medical Boards</p>
<p>1:45 – 2:45 pm</p>	<p>Telehealth's Role in Behavioral Health Access and Outcomes</p> <p>Experts will discuss telehealth's key role in access to behavioral health services as well as the integration of behavioral and physical health services.</p> <p>Moderator: Trina Dutta, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration</p>	<p>Chris Fore, PhD Indian Health Service</p> <p>Donna Dittman Hale, MHA, CTC Bay Rivers Telehealth</p> <p>Janet Orwig, MBA, CAE Association of State & Provincial Psychology Boards</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:00 pm</p>	<p>Break</p>	
<p>3:00 – 4:00 pm</p>	<p>Telehealth Trends and Research</p> <p>This session will highlight recent telehealth research findings and discuss how this is helping to integrate telehealth into the standard of care.</p> <p>Moderator: Wakina Scott, PhD, MPH Health Resources & Services Administration</p>	<p>Lok Samson, PhD, MHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation</p> <p>Sara Couture, MPH Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation</p> <p>Laura Jacobus-Kantor, PhD Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation</p> <p>Robin Vanderpool, DrPH National Institutes of Health</p> <p>Kevin Chaney, MGS Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality</p>
<p>4:00 – 4:30pm</p>	<p>Closing Remarks</p>	<p>CAPT Heather Dimeris, MS, RD, Director, Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, Health Resources and Services Administration</p>