



ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM

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HHS Deputy Secretary to Announce \$6.5 Million in Telehealth Funding for Rural Areas, Including Alaska

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium will host a press conference on Monday, Jan. 11 at 12:30 p.m., at the Consortium Office Building, located at 4000 Ambassador Drive, in Anchorage. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Deputy Secretary, Eric Hargan, will announce the details of \$6.5 million in funding for a project to increase telehealth services in rural areas in the Lower 48 and Alaska.

Planned agenda:

12:15 p.m.	Media and spectators gather
12:30	Welcome from Dr. Robert Onders, Alaska Native Medical Center Administrator
12:35	Andy Teuber, ANTHC Chairman and President
12:40	HHS Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan
12:45	Closing, Media interviews

Project Summary

This funding is to develop a telehealth broadband pilot program that links federal initiatives at HHS, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to assess the broadband capacity of health care providers and patients to fully participate in virtual health care services. This is a key initiative to accurately measure bandwidth and the quality of connectivity in rural areas in four states (Alaska, Michigan, Texas and West Virginia). Funds are being provide by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) through the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) to the national Telehealth Technology Assessment Center (TTAC) which is managed by the Consortium. The funding commitment of \$6.5 million over three years will support the development and deployment of technologies to measure connectivity in rural areas, and to understand the impact of connectivity on telehealth capabilities.

Community Impact in Alaska

This funding allocation will increase the Consortium's ability to care for more patients remotely when it's medically appropriate, from their homes or clinics within their communities, reducing the frequency of extensive travel for health care needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a tenfold increase in telehealth utilization. The Consortium has successfully and dramatically increased its ability to provide care directly to patients from their homes, but significant challenges still exist.



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Ensuring that sufficient bandwidth and high-enough quality connectivity for clinically valuable telehealth visits with the patient is one of those challenges. Even with testing connections, hardware and running through the process with patients prior to their first telehealth visit, users sometimes experience changes in the quality of the connection. When this happens, patients can become frustrated and resistant to utilizing the technology in the future. This funding will allow us to know the quality of the connection in advance, increasing success for patients and avoiding a very labor-intensive process of testing connectivity.

Some technologies, such as Zoom, work better than others over satellite or low-bandwidth connections. To improve the patient experience and provide better care, it is important to know more about the types of connectivity available in rural areas and use technology that work best over that connectivity.

This project will align these two facets. The Consortium will learn about, measure, and report the data it finds regarding the quality and speed of connectivity in rural areas and use the best performing technologies for telehealth. In the short term, the Consortium can use this data to make better decisions and planning for telehealth to patients, and reduce the labor and time spent testing connectivity. In the long term, this data will be used to drive policy and infrastructure changes to improve connectivity to rural clinics and homes across Alaska.

Community Locations to Measure Bandwidth

Alaska

- Aleutians West Borough
- Bristol Bay Borough
- Dillingham Census Area
- Nome Census Area
- North Slope Borough
- Northwest Arctic Borough

Central Michigan (counties)

- Gladwin
- Manistee
- Missaukee



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- Montmorency
- Osceola
- Oscoda

West Texas (counties)

- Crosby
- Fisher
- Haskell
- Jones
- Lamb
- Mitchell

Southern West Virginia (counties)

- Calhoun
- Clay
- Jackson
- Kanawha
- Nicholas
- Roane
- Ritchie

To learn more about ANTHC's COVID-19 response, or the other programs and health services offered to our communities, please visit anthc.org