Telehealth continues to be a transformational tool in reaching many of the country's 2.6 million veterans. This is pivotal in reaching veterans living in rural and remote areas, many of whom lack access to health care either due to transportation issues, mobility issues, or other barriers. The Department of Veterans VA Video Connect mHealth app has helped increase access to critical health care to veterans in more isolated areas. Since its inception in 2018, it has seen significant growth. However, COVID-19 has introduced a surge of new users.

Before COVID-19, the app typically saw 10,000 visits per week. During the height of the pandemic visits soared 1,000% to roughly 120,000 visits per week. The surge has not gone unnoticed by lawmakers. Last month the VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act expanded on 2018's VA Mission Act to not only expand the mHealth network, but also allows VA providers to provide care to veterans in any location. In response, the VA has continued to take steps in increasing access to health care for veterans by distributing more than 26,000 tablets to veterans in rural and remote areas and working with wireless carriers to ensure access.

"We want every Veteran to have a choice to schedule an in-person, telephone or video visit with their providers depending on their preferences for health care delivery," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement. "VA is committed to offering Veterans the health care they deserve, whenever and wherever they need it."

The VA's response to expanding telehealth access is in keeping with other organizations adjustments to policy during COVID-19, such as CMS expanding coverage, services provided, and enabling other regulatory flexibilities. There's currently a push in Congress, the Equal Access to Care Act, that would allow providers to use telehealth for treating patients in any location for up to 6 months after the COVID-19 emergency. Many states are moving to make the changes permanent.

The HTRC's July 7th webinar will provide insight on providing and improving telehealth
services for Veterans in rural areas. You can register for the webinar here.

EVENTS

HTRC Telehealth Webinar Series

Rural Veterans and Telehealth

July 7, 2020
12-1 p.m. CST

REGISTER NOW!

HTRC Webinar Series:
July 7, 2020
12-1 p.m. CST

Facilitated by

Christi Sherrill, MPH
Program Manager - Oklahoma Flex Rural Veterans Health Access Program
OSU - AHC Innovator
National Center for Wellness & Recovery

Meryl Kleiner, MS
Curriculum Developer, OK Flex-RVHAP

This presentation will focus on innovative approaches to the provision of health care services to Veterans in rural areas in Oklahoma.

Approaches will include an overview of how to enhance curriculum currently available in telehealth, improve the transfer of information in the electronic health record system for Veterans seen by both VA and private health care providers, and expand existing networks to increase access to mental health services through partnerships. These approaches will improve health outcomes for rural Veterans, as well as assist health care professionals to overcome challenges they may encounter when treating this population.

Register here.

The Heartland Telehealth Resource Center will present a series of webinars on June 2, July 7 and August 4. Update will be provided on current regulation and policy changes in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

There is no cost to participate in the series, but registration is required. CME and continuing education is available.

Next session
Funding Opportunities

FCC ANNOUNCES COVID-19 TELEHEALTH PROGRAM
New Program Will Provide $200 Million to Support Health Care Providers and Patients Across the Country During the Coronavirus Outbreak
The Federal Communications Commission’s Wireline Competition Bureau began accepting applications for the COVID-19 Telehealth Program on Monday, April 13, 2020. The COVID-19 Telehealth Program will provide $200 million in funding, appropriated by Congress as part of the CARES Act, to help health care providers furnish connected care services to patients at their homes or mobile locations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further information and the dedicated application portal are available at: www.fcc.gov/covid19telehealth

USDA Announces Second Application Window for Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program Funding
$72 Million Available to Help Rural Residents Gain Access to Health Care and Educational Opportunities
The USDA is opening a second application window for funding under the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grant program, beginning April 14 and lasting through July 13, 2020. The Distance Learning and Telemedicine program helps rural communities use the unique capabilities of telecommunications to connect to each other and to the world, overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density. Information and Application materials are available at: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Hospitals receive Emergency Oklahoma Universal Services Fund (OUSF) for Telemedicine bandwidth:
The Oklahoma Corporation Commission has developed a COVID-19 OUSF Emergency Response Process to get funds approved for bandwidth increases. Hospitals, Schools, and Libraries currently receiving funding should reach out to their service provider directly to request an increase in bandwidth during the designated emergency period. Healthcare providers, if this change puts your Federal funding in jeopardy, we are hereby committing to cover your services. This is a public safety matter and cannot be delayed.

Upon request from a hospital for increased bandwidth under this program, OUSF Service Providers (telecommunications carrier) should immediately submit the form provided in the link below to request immediate approval of bandwidth increases for eligible entities. https://www.occeweb.com/pc/OUSF/OUSF_COVID19.htm

HTRC and ShowMe ECHO: TELEMEDICINE
Stay up-to-date with the latest changes in telemedicine with the Telemedicine ECHO offered by the HTRC and Missouri Telehealth Network (MTN) for providers in Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma every Tuesday from 9a to 10a.

Topics include reimbursement, operations, regulations, best practices and more. It's a great way to learn from and collaborate with telehealth leaders and physician experts. It's no cost to participating sites or individuals.

Register at ShowMeEcho.org

**COVID-19 ECHOs**

**Missouri Telehealth Network** COVID-19 ECHO will meet via Zoom videoconferencing every Monday from noon to 1 p.m. Anyone interested in learning how to protect, diagnose and treat Missouri patients with COVID-19, as well as how to protect their overall community, are encouraged to join. A multidisciplinary expert team led by Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Director Randall Williams, MD, will share the latest developments, answer questions, and discuss management of patient cases presented by participants. Register and learn more here.

**Oklahoma State University-Center for Health Sciences** has launched a COVID-19 Oklahoma Update ECHO to keep healthcare providers updated as the situation changes. This ECHO will be held weekly every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:30 a.m. until further notice. Please register here.

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**COVID-19 Resources**

You can access the resources, here. Please share with others who could benefit from the information. We will continue to add and update resources as they come