

Health Information Compliance Alert

Reader Questions: Bolster Telehealth Savvy With These Federal Resources

Question: Our rural practice has really taken advantage of the telehealth expansion to help our patients, but we need more financial assistance and guidance to modernize our hardware. We missed the chance to apply for the second round of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) COVID-19 Telehealth funding. Are there any other grant options or is there another place to find telehealth assistance?

Iowa Subscriber

Answer: Though the FCC COVID-19 Telehealth Program application period is closed, there are other federal resources available for rural and underserved providers.

On Aug. 18, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced another \$19 million to go towards Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA's) rural programs. The "key investments" are divided between the following four HRSA departments, according to an HHS release:

Telehealth Technology-Enabled Learning Program (TTELP): The feds earmarked more than \$4 million for this program, awarding nine organizations money to assist specialists at academic medical centers and rural primary care providers.

Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs): Twelve regional centers, which offer community telehealth assistance, and two national TRCs, which provide policy guidance, training, and equipment, will receive federal funding. HHS will disperse \$4.55 million among the aforementioned TRCs, which "provide information, assistance, and education on telehealth to organizations and individuals who are actively providing or want to provide telehealth services to patients," the agency says in a release.



Evidence-Based Direct to Consumer Telehealth Network Program (EB TNP): \$3.85 million will be divided between 11 organizations to boost telehealth networks nationwide and bolster primary, acute, and behavioral care.

Telehealth Centers of Excellence (COE) program: Two organizations will split \$6.5 million in federal telehealth funding to thwart chronic disease and poverty in rural and underserved communities. "The Telehealth COEs will be located in academic medical centers and will serve as telehealth incubators to pilot new telehealth services, track outcomes, and publish telehealth research. The COEs will establish an evidence-base for telehealth programs and a framework for future telehealth programs," HHS explains.

Find HRSA's telehealth offerings, including additional guidance on grant programs and broadband initiatives, at www.hrsa.gov/rural-health/telehealth.

Plus: On Sept. 15, telehealth advocates - including the American Telemedicine Association, HIMSS, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and others - urged the U.S. Senate to consider adding another \$27 million to HRSA's TRC program in upcoming legislation. In a letter addressed to Sens. **Roy Blunt** (R-Missouri) and **Patty Murray** (D-Washington), 11 organizations reminded legislators that TRCs have experienced an "an 800-percent increase in demand for telehealth assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic across the nation, yet have been level-funded since 2006."

As the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) stretches on and the numbers trend upwards, industry advocates implore the congressional leaders to increase TRC funding to bolster the healthcare industry and help providers



struggling with pandemic fallout and other issues. Read the letter at www.aamc.org/media/56476/download?attachment.