



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

News Release

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Announces New Rural Telehealth Initiative's Telehealth Broadband Pilot Program *TTUHSC to Serve as Community Site and State Partner*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today (Jan. 11) announced a new Rural Telehealth Initiative's Telehealth Broadband Pilot Program. Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) will serve as a community site and state partner.

HHS announced an \$8 million investment in the launch of the pilot program that will aim to assess the broadband capacity available to rural health care providers and patient communities, and to improve their ability to participate in telehealth services through cross-agency collaboration.

Through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), funds will be awarded to the National Telehealth Technology Association, who will work to implement the program in communities across four states — Alaska, Michigan, Texas and West Virginia. HRSA also will award funds to the Telehealth-Focused Research Centers to evaluate the program across in those communities.

TTUHSC was named the lead organization in Texas for the pilot program. The increased need for telehealth services during the Public Health Emergency due to COVID-19 has identified gaps in broadband services, particularly for rural and frontier communities. The Telehealth Broadband Pilot Program will help rural communities prepare and respond to coronavirus-related telehealth needs.

The assessment will focus on Crosby County, Fisher County, Haskell County, Jones County, Lamb County and Mitchell County gathering data on broadband capacity in the various prospective delivery points for telehealth resources in a rural setting.

“We are honored to be the lead organization in Texas for the pilot program and to work collectively with our local, state and federal partners,” TTUHSC President Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D., said. “This is a much needed-focus for these underserved areas in gaining access to health care through innovative models such as telemedicine and telehealth.”

This telehealth pilot program is part of the Rural Action Plan that HHS launched this past year and lays out a path to coordinate agency efforts to transform and improve rural health care in in tangible ways.

“We are excited to collaborate on this pilot program that will identify rural communities’ access to broadband to improve their ability to use telehealth services,” HRSA Administrator Tom Engels said.

TTUHSC Telemedicine Director Ariel Santos, M.D., said this pilot project will assess and ensure the future of telemedicine especially in rural areas.

“Telemedicine is currently expanding, revolutionizing delivery and access to health care,” Santos said. “Adoption of telehealth in rural communities hinges heavily on strong internet connectivity and broadband access.”