

### Background

Technology is driving innovation in healthcare at high speed. Despite the growth of healthcare technology, many office-based physicians are still without electronic health records and telehealth technology. Many rural providers still lack secure, reliable, high-speed internet access. Without this vital infrastructure, access to care remains out of reach for many portions of the population. Broadband subsidies are funds allocated for extending this infrastructure into rural and underserved areas, often for healthcare or educational purposes.

### The Facts

- The federal government provides broadband subsidies to clinics and hospitals in rural and medically underserved communities to improve broadband connectivity to promote healthcare technology. This funding is provided primarily through the FCC Rural Health Care Program which is part of the Universal Service Fund with the goal of increasing adoption of broadband enabled healthcare to support applications like telehealth and health information exchange in rural and medically underserved urban communities.
- In June, 2018, the FCC increased the Rural Health Care Program annual funding allocation from \$400 million to \$571 million providing a 65% subsidy on monthly recurring broadband costs for eligible clinics and hospitals for 2018. In the future, the annual allocation will be indexed to inflation. The growth in demand for broadband funding is being driven by the expansion of telehealth, hosted electronic health records and other broadband enabled healthcare applications and services.
- Federally supported Telehealth Resource Centers have been providing programmatic and technical assistance with no cost to rural and underserved communities as they work to advance nationwide adoption and integration of telehealth for over a decade without any increase in funding.
- Healthcare facilities struggle in rural and medically underserved areas with doctor shortages, and patient populations suffer because of the great distances they are required to travel to obtain care. Broadband funding enables healthcare providers in these areas to build telehealth deployment programs to ensure care is accessible to rural communities, regardless of location.
- With the focus on expanding telehealth throughout the safety net and into patient homes, the need for stable, secure, and affordable broadband in rural areas is critical. Extending connectivity out to these rural areas must remain one of the primary goals for telehealth advocates.

### OCHIN Supports

- Increasing FCC funding and supporting innovative ideas to extend high-speed methods of broadband access into rural and medically underserved communities to expand access to telehealth, hosted electronic health records and other broadband enabled healthcare services.
- Creating a central repository for all federal broadband and telehealth funding sources simplify the application process and increase access. OCHIN also recommends increasing outreach and provider education on funding programs to rural and medically underserved communities.
- Increasing HRSA funding of the existing 12 Regional and 2 National Telehealth Resource Centers. In the last 10 years, despite explosive interest and growth in telehealth capabilities, Telehealth Resource Centers operated without any increase in funding.

Questions?

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