

Background

Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers treat all data on the Internet equally, and not discriminate or charge differently by user, content, website, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or method of communication. Under these principles, internet service providers are unable to intentionally block, slow down or charge money for specific websites and online content. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) acted in July, 2017 to remove net neutrality protections enabling internet service providers to impose additional service charges or slow down (“throttle”) speeds for customers that use competing web sites or content providers.

The Facts

- High-speed online access is a necessity, not a luxury, especially where healthcare is concerned. Rural, and low-income households are already medically underserved and many lack broadband access. Imposing additional charges on these households for broadband delivery of video and advanced health care services could worsen the digital divide and preserve existing disparities in health care delivery.
- Any reduction in access to, or increase in the cost for, online access to health care services will disproportionately affect rural and low-income patient populations already face burdensome health care access issues.
- Removal of net neutrality protections could have a negative impact on adoption and utilization of telehealth services which use live video conferencing and video streaming over broadband connections. If internet service providers begin to impose additional charges on their customers who use these services, it could have a negative impact on telehealth adoption particularly in rural, low income and medically underserved communities.
- Rural populations traditionally suffer from higher chronic disease and opioid abuse rates.¹ Virtual care and online access to patient health care portals and other health care information along with services like remote patient monitoring are improving care delivery in rural and medically underserved communities. Removal of net neutrality protections threatens this progress.

OCHIN Supports

- Reinstating net neutrality.
- Until net neutrality can be reinstated, encourage states to adopt legislation which prevents the throttling of healthcare data exchange.
- Encouraging the use of virtual care to improve access to health care in rural and medically underserved communities and improve the value of healthcare spending.

Questions?

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¹ The CDC found in general, rural areas experienced a 45% higher opioid overdose death rate as compared to urban areas. Rural Americans are also more likely to die from heart disease, cancer, and chronic lower respiratory disease, and have higher rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and stroke.