

# FCC Announces Initial Connected Care Pilot Program Projects For Telehealth

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On January 15, 2021, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [announced](#) the initial pilot projects selected for the Connected Care Pilot Program (“Pilot Program”) for telehealth services. The list includes 14 pilot projects spanning 11 states and more than 150 treatment sites, totaling \$26.6 million awarded of the allotted \$100 million under the Pilot Program.

## The First Round of Funded Projects

The 14 selected pilot projects cover a broad range of services aimed at establishing and improving telehealth services, also referred to as connected care services, especially for low-income and veteran patients.

The awarded funds were awarded primarily to programs that intend to provide internet connectivity, broadband access, remote patient monitoring and video visit capabilities to low income and rural communities.<sup>[1]</sup> The Pilot Program’s initial awards highlight just how critical connectivity is to adequately and consistently address current and future health challenges, not only in response to COVID-19 pandemic, but also with healthcare and treatments generally going forward. The awards reflect a focus on establishing and improving overall capacity to provide telehealth services.

Rural communities, who have long-suffered from limited access to Internet and broadband, are getting the opportunity to launch telehealth systems and improve connectivity so patients can actually access greatly needed services. These awards also focus on providers launching programs for low-income patients, who especially suffer for lack of access to broadband.

The remote patient monitoring and video visit capabilities awards are intended to afford organizations the opportunity to monitor and address both short- and long-term health conditions. Conditions ranging from high-risk pregnancies, maternal health conditions, infectious diseases, heart conditions, cancer, mental health, opioid dependency and other substance abuse disorders, along with many other conditions under which low-income patients will suffer without continued medical care and monitoring.

The funds are being distributed to universities, hospitals, and organizations in major cities to improve their telehealth services, as well as to more local and rural health organizations trying to navigate the

launch and establishment of these critical telehealth services for the very first time. The ultimate goal of the funding is providing quality connected care to Americans while maintaining the physical separation required during the pandemic.

## Potential Future Pilot Program Awards

The FCC initially funded the Pilot Program with \$100 million as a more long-term solution to address telehealth needs. Given the Pilot Program's three-year duration, it is not unreasonable to expect more awards going forward, with approximately \$73.4 million left to allocate. And though the Pilot Program has not further specified who might be next in line for funding, the initial rewards present an undeniable focus: to support and fund organizations committed to establishing and maintaining connected care and telehealth services to those with the greatest need and least access.

Major health organizations, universities, community health centers, and others, should have continued opportunities to apply for these funds to expand and improve much-needed telehealth services throughout the United States.

It will be interesting to see what the new administration will do with the grants moving forward; as developments occur we will continue to provide updates on the Pilot Program right here on the blog!

This article is not an unequivocal statement of the law, but instead represents our best interpretation of where things currently stand. This article does not address the potential impacts of the numerous other local, state and federal orders that have been issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but which are not referenced in this article.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] See these additional recent blog posts which describe other Federal Programs seeking to enhance the availability of telehealth services to rural and low income communities: "[The Permanency for Audio-Only Telehealth Act: A Matter of Healthcare Equity?](#)" and "[Permanent Expansion of Medicare Telehealth Services](#)".

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