

TALKING POINTS

Rural Americans Face Unique Health Care Challenges

- ▶ Chronic disease causes about 75 percent of health care costs and contributes to about 70 percent of all deaths in the United States.
- ▶ Rural areas, which contain about 20 percent of the U.S. population, face additional risk caused by physician shortages and lack of access to nearby health care facilities. Although 25 percent of the U.S. population resides in rural areas, only 10 percent of the nation's physicians are in rural America. And, rural areas have 70 percent fewer specialists per 100,000 people.
- ▶ Additionally, poverty increases the risk of complications from chronic conditions by decreasing the likelihood that these individuals will have health insurance at all or otherwise be able to absorb the costs of treatment and preventative care.

Telemedicine Can Enable Better Health Care

Numerous studies have demonstrated the health benefits of telemedicine across multiple medical conditions. The economic benefits of telemedicine and telehealth have also been found to create substantial health care cost savings, as well as ancillary savings relating to travel to distant facilities and lost wages.

Veterans Benefit from Telemedicine

- ▶ Veterans constitute 11 percent of the U.S. population and approximately 25 percent of the nation's veterans live in rural areas. Although the VA has health centers throughout the United States, many rural veterans nevertheless face transportation and access difficulties.
- ▶ To address this problem at least in part, in 2016, the VA provided more than 2.17 million telehealth interactions to more than 702,000 patients, or approximately 12 percent of veterans enrolled in the VA health care system.
- ▶ VA telehealth is associated with a 25 percent reduction in bed days of care and a 19 percent reduction in hospital admissions.



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Expanding Opportunities for Veterans

The Virtual Living RoomSM provides free broadband access to VA telehealth and other online services by providing access points in publicly-accessible locations such as a library, VFW, Legion Hall or firehouse. These venues provide complete computer workstations, privacy and necessary peripherals to connect to VA medical professionals. The Virtual Living Room can provide veterans with peer and technical support and can be an on-ramp to home use of VA telehealth services.



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