

# EXPANDING TELEHEALTH FUNDING COLLABORATIVES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

MARTIN COUNTY 2021

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In response to COVID-19, a federal policy change has temporarily given providers the flexibility to use readily available technology for appointments. Providers do not risk penalties for violations of HIPAA rules for the good faith provision of telehealth services.

**Indiana Senate Bill 3, Telehealth Matters, further improved access to telehealth services for state residents with an emphasis on prevention and mental health.** While telehealth existed in Indiana prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, post declaration of a national, public health emergency, providing care through technological alternatives has increased resulting in increased access to health services, particularly in rural, Indiana.

Telehealth services:

- Limit unnecessary physical contact between the patient and provider
- Increase accessibility to patients, regardless of location
- Decreases wait time to see a provider
- Expands access to services that otherwise do not exist in some communities

## Current Telehealth Projects in Rural Indiana

The Indiana Rural Schools Clinic Network provides access to primary and behavioral care school-based health clinics in rural Indiana and increases rural access to telehealth services.

The Crossroads Partnership for Telehealth is a collaborative agreement with the Indiana Rural Health Association (IRHA), the Richard G. Lugar Center for Rural Health, and multiple rural hospitals in Indiana. It exists to improve mental health access and awareness across different counties in Indiana.

The Indiana Telehealth Network connects healthcare providers, particularly in rural areas, with funding for high-speed broadband access to deliver telehealth services to improve the health and well-being of Indiana residents.

## How Do We Sustain This Progress? Collaboration.

Local initiatives are rooted in communities familiar with the issues and lead by passionate, dedicated community members. Unfortunately, rural communities do not always have the access to the financial means and people power to address local issues.

The solution is collaboration. While one small, rural agency may not have the capacity to apply for and manage federal grant funding, state agencies do. State agencies have the power and capacity to apply for and distribute larger federal funding opportunities. This is a solution that utilizes each party's assets and strengths to benefit the larger picture.

## The Story of Martin County

Martin County is a small, rural community with no emergency departments and a 27-mile commute to the nearest hospital. Expansion of telehealth services has opened doors to mental health services that have never before been available to the community.



Communities like the Martin County community have been working tirelessly for years to address the lack of access to mental health care services in rural Indiana. Their efforts bore Faith Net, an initiative that connects patients in the county to mental health providers via telehealth. This initiative was only made possible by the federal and state legislations that have allowed for expansion of telehealth services in the midst of a pandemic. Expanding telehealth services permanently offers a cost-effective solution to a national crisis in rural health.

## State Level Recommendations

- Advocate for county-level and local initiatives.
- Allocate funding to grant writing training/support.
- Allocate funding to foster collaborative relationships between state and local agencies.
- Apply for federal funding opportunities that will support local work.

## Federal Level Recommendations

- Support state agencies in applying for federal funding opportunities.
- Make federal funding applications accessible to state applicants.
- Encourage state agencies to apply for federal funding opportunities in collaboration with smaller, local agencies.