

[HHS Increases Telehealth Promotion, Rural Hospital Funding for COVID-19](#)

The agency will provide additional financial support to rural hospitals and help enable telehealth visits for patients and providers.

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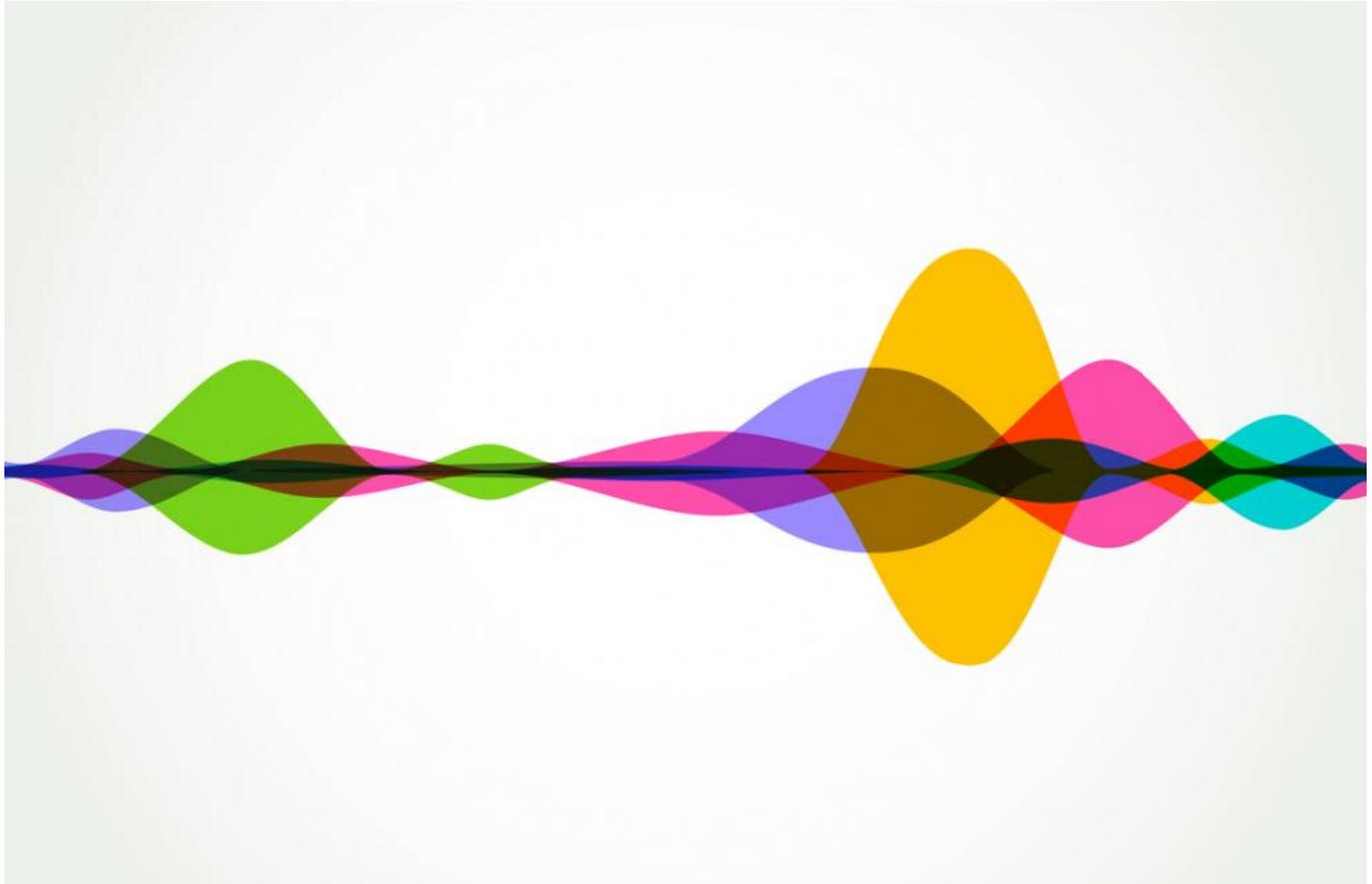


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The Department of Health and Human Services is increasing awareness around expanding telehealth services for patients and providers across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, attending particularly to areas with historically limited access to health care services, such as rural communities.

The agency launched a new telehealth website Wednesday through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as a means to better inform people about ongoing federal efforts to support and promote telehealth programs at this time.

"During the pandemic, telehealth is more vital than ever," HHS Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan emphasized in a press call. "This new one-stop resource will help Americans avoid having to look up telehealth information in so many different places."

In addition to launching the aggregated telehealth-information platform, the agency announced it will provide \$165 million in funding to support telehealth in rural hospitals through HRSA.

"Telehealth has emerged as a vital tool during this crisis, allowing people nationwide to quickly connect with health care workers from a distance instead of further burdening hospitals and doctor's offices," said HRSA Administrator Thomas Engles. "This [funding] will help these rural hospitals continue to be able to see the patients that currently are not coming into the hospitals ... [and] to maintain a connection with a patient."

The funding will be delivered to 1,779 small rural hospitals as well as 14 HRSA-funded telehealth resource centers that offer technical assistance, information and education to those establishing telehealth programs.

These recently awarded funds are separate from the \$11.5 million granted to the centers by the HRSA's Federal Office of Rural Health Policy through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Rural hospitals also will be able to apply for telehealth service reimbursement through various means such as insurance, Engles noted, adding, "that will help with the revenue stream that some of these hospitals are losing because patients are not coming in."

However, some hospitals still may face significant challenges accessing certain populations due to variabilities between communities and state-to-state access to broadband internet services, the HRSA officials said.

There are longstanding federal efforts to address internet connectivity disparities, such as the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Rural Health Care Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Broadband program, Tom Morris, the associate director for HRSA, noted. He stressed that the urgent need for telehealth adoption in these areas to strategically manage COVID-19 is widely apparent.

"We've had a dramatic increase in the number of folks who are calling our telehealth resource centers for help in adapting to this new situation," said Morris, emphasizing that the funding for the centers will help enable "any health care entity that's having to dramatically shift its operations to one of the telehealth service delivery models."

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