

Statement of The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

For the

Pennsylvania Office of Rural health  
2016 Rural Health Briefing

Submitted by

Timothy Ohrum  
Vice President, Legislative Advocacy  
The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania  
May 18, 2016

Good Morning. I am Tim Ohrum, Vice President, Legislative Advocacy, for The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP). HAP represents and advocates for nearly 240 acute and specialty care hospitals and health systems across the state and the patients they serve. I'd like to thank Representative Baker and Senator Brooks for hosting this morning's legislative briefing

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about the many challenges with accessing rural health care and offer a suggestion on a way to move forward.

As you are well aware, accessing health care in rural Pennsylvania is a chronic challenge for a variety of reasons, including geography, recruitment and retention of clinicians, and the rate of uninsured and underinsured—to list a few.

Today I want to talk with you about something that you can do to make it easier for patients to access the health care system and for hospitals to acquire specialty services, reduce costs, and most importantly, improve outcomes. Today I'm here to talk about telehealth.

**What is telehealth?** Telehealth is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve a patient's clinical health status. Two-way video, email, smartphone, wireless tools, and other forms of telecommunications technology can be used to deliver high-quality health care that has the potential to increase Pennsylvanians' access to specialized care, save time and costs, and decrease unnecessary readmissions.

**Why is telehealth effective?** Telehealth can be used to connect a specialist to a patient at a distance. It can be used to deliver life-saving care, as well as deliver routine care in a timely, cost-effective manner. Services delivered through telehealth can save time and money, as well as improve health outcomes and population health. Telehealth can increase consumer access to specialists in urban, suburban, and importantly, rural areas.

The following are two brief examples of how telehealth care be utilized:

1. **Telestroke:** When it comes to a stroke, seconds count. The typical stroke victim loses 1.9 million brain cells each minute a stroke is left untreated.
  - With telestroke, a stroke victim could survive the traumatic event with greater quality of life and spend much less on health care costs for rehabilitation and other services.
  
2. **Teledermatology:** Dermatologists are specialists, and, therefore, may be difficult to access across Pennsylvania. Even getting checked out for a non-life-threatening dermatology issue, such as a rash, could prove to be difficult and result in months of waiting to be seen by a professional.
  - With teledermatology, the patient could have the ability to take a photograph of the skin issue, send it to the specialist, and receive diagnosis and treatment within minutes.

Senator Vogel and Representative Quinn soon will introduce telehealth legislation to remove key barriers in the delivery of telehealth in Pennsylvania. HAP's supports this legislation because it would:

- Define telehealth
- Offer guidelines outlining who is able to provide health care services through telehealth technology
- Require health insurers to provide payment for health care services delivered through telehealth if they pay for the same service in person

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia require that private insurers cover telehealth the same as they cover in-person services. Pennsylvania hospitals believe that now is the time for action to support telehealth in the commonwealth.

In conclusion, Pennsylvania's hospital community sees telehealth as an important tool in the delivery of health care that will increase Pennsylvanians' access to specialized care, save time and costs, and decrease unnecessary readmissions. HAP and the hospital community support legislation that defines telehealth, offers guidelines on who is able to provide health care services through telehealth, and requires health insurers to provide payment for telehealth services.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.