

NC Healthcare Broadband Coalition

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Who We Are

Healthcare Broadband Coalition (NCHBC)

The NC Healthcare Broadband Coalition (NCHBC) is an association of representatives from NC's healthcare and public health organizations and affiliates. The Coalition is dedicated to making reliable, high-performance (internet service) available to all NC's frontline providers, affiliates, and patients. With upcoming federal funding to support the expansion of broadband (internet service) in North Carolina, healthcare providers have a unique opportunity to secure high-quality, affordable broadband for their facilities and their patients. But to do so, frontline NC healthcare providers must be aware of these opportunities, and they must collaborate with other local stakeholders to make sure funders are aware of their communities' broadband deficits. Overall, a coordinated, statewide effort will be necessary to secure adequate funding and address our broadband gaps. The NCHBC will do this on behalf of North Carolina's frontline healthcare providers. The work of the Coalition will be staffed by the North Carolina Telehealth Network Association (www.NCTNA.org).

Regular Communication

As part of this effort, NCHBC will send you regular communications about NC's broadband funding opportunities, activities on local/state/federal levels, and lessons learned on a monthly basis.

Why is Broadband Important to You?

With broadband or high-speed internet, providers across the state can access the resources they need to provide the highest quality of care, and patients have access to high-quality care anywhere.



Broadband and NC

NC Broadband Deficits

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) estimates only 59.4% of North Carolina households have connections with the minimum speed of at least 25mbps down and 3mbps up. (Most broadband experts believe this minimum bandwidth to be outdated. Current thinking is the minimum connection should be 100/20 scalable to 100/100.) In other words, about 40% of NC households are either underserved or unserved with less than minimum broadband speeds, which cannot reliably support such things as streaming, Zoom sessions, image and data sharing, and telehealth services. Further the most recent American Community Survey reports that 25% of North Carolina households do not connect to the internet at all.

Of course, an important reason for this limited of access is inadequate broadband infrastructure. This is particularly true for rural, poorer North Carolina counties. But this is not the only barrier to widespread broadband adoption (see other barriers listed on this side) and if we are to effectively address gaps in access, we must address all of these barriers.

With regards to NC healthcare in particular, affordable broadband supports distributed electronic health records, health information exchanges, specialized health information technology applications, and importantly, telehealth. Remote patient monitoring, behavioral health consultations, and wellness visits are popular telehealth services, and all point to the importance of broadband connectivity for both the healthcare provider and for their patients. Unfortunately connectivity for many rural providers and their patients do not support effective telehealth. In fact, NCTNA conducted a survey of its healthcare provider members, asking them to list barriers to the expansion and adoption of telehealth. The number one barrier was poor patient broadband connectivity, and the second was limited patient digital literacy. Like many other states, North Carolina has a clear and growing rural/urban divide in healthcare access, but with effective and widespread adoption of telehealth, we can reduce that divide substantially. In turn, to promote the adoption of telehealth, a key next step is widespread adoption of adequate broadband by North Carolina's patients and healthcare providers.



Barriers to Broadband Access:

1. Inadequate broadband structure
2. Cost of broadband subscription
3. Limited digital literacy
4. Cost of home computers/devices
5. Perceived lack of benefits from broadband

What's Next?

Our next edition will let cover:

- Federal and state funding programs
- Up-to-date information of North Carolina's allocation of broadband funds

Contact

Thank you for taking the time to read this initial bulletin.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please let us know at:

nhealthcarebroadbandcoalition@nctna.org