The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers: COVID-19 Assistance

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Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers ................................................................. 1
   Statutory Authority .......................................................................................................................... 1
   Appropriations for the TRC Program ......................................................................................... 2
   Use of Funds .................................................................................................................................. 2
   Two National TRCs ...................................................................................................................... 3
   Twelve Regional TRCs .................................................................................................................. 3

Tables

Table 1. The 12 Regional Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) .................................................. 3

Contacts

Author Information .............................................................................................................................. 4
Introduction

On January 31, 2020, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) a Public Health Emergency (PHE). During this public health emergency, the Secretary of HHS has taken action to encourage the use of telehealth. Telehealth generally refers to a health care provider’s use of information and communication technology in the delivery of clinical and nonclinical health care services. The use of telehealth during public health emergencies can assist health care professionals with, for example, reserving in-person care for patients with critical health care needs and diminishing the spread of communicable diseases. Some stakeholders, however, are experiencing challenges with establishing, implementing, and offering virtual health care services through telehealth programs.

This report provides a brief overview of the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers and describes its capacity to help various stakeholders adapt telehealth to provide care during national public health emergencies.

National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers

The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers, referred to in this report as the TRC Consortium, is helping stakeholders (e.g., state and local health care facilities, health care administrators, chief financial officers, health care providers, and patients) respond to COVID-19 through the use of telehealth. The TRC Consortium provides short- and long-term assistance, access to telehealth experts, policy analysis, technology assessments, education and training materials, and specialized tools and templates, all of which are generally provided at no cost.

Statutory Authority

The TRC Consortium is the grantee of the Telehealth Resource Center Program. The grant program, which was established by the Health Care Safety Net Amendments of 2002 (P.L. 107-
The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers: COVID-19 Assistance

251, as amended) that was recently amended by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, Economic Security Act (CARES Act; P.L. 116-136), aims to support initiatives that utilize telehealth technologies.\(^7\)

Stakeholders outside of these areas can access resources through the TRC Consortium. For example, on March 19, 2020, the TRC Consortium held a webinar on telehealth and COVID-19 for the public.\(^8\)

### Appropriations for the TRC Program

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of HHS administers the grant program. The authorization of $20 million in appropriated funds for the TRC program expired in 2002; an appropriation “for such sums as may be necessary” expired in 2006.\(^9\) However, Congress continues to fund the program through annual appropriations. The FY2020 appropriations report language provides $28.5 million to HRSA’s overarching Telehealth Program, which includes the TRC program.\(^10\)

### Use of Funds

Current law authorizes the TRC Consortium to use funds to pay for salaries, equipment, operation, and other costs for

- providing technical assistance, training, support, and for travel expenses for health care providers and a range of health care entities that provide or will provide telehealth services;
- disseminating information and research findings related to telehealth services;
- promoting effective collaboration among TRCs and the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) within HRSA;
- conducting evaluations to determine the best use of telehealth technologies to meet health care needs;
- promoting the integration of the technologies used in clinical information systems with other telehealth technologies;
- fostering the use of telehealth technologies to provide education for health care providers and consumers in a more effective manner; and
- implementing special projects or studies under the direction of OAT.\(^11\)

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\(^7\) This new authority is pending codification at 42 U.S.C. §254c-14 and Section 330I of the Public Health Service Act. See Section 3212 of P.L. 116-136.


\(^11\) This list was adapted from 42 U.S.C. §254c-14(k)(2).
P.L. 107-251 allowed HRSA to establish TRCs under the TRC program; therefore, the TRC Consortium comprises 2 national TRCs and 12 regional TRCs. (Section 3212 of P.L. 116-136 removes HRSA’s authority to establish additional TRCs.)

Two National TRCs

There are two national TRCs: (1) the National Telehealth Policy Resource Center (NTRC-P) and (2) the National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center (TTAC). The Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) is the federally designated NTRC-P. CCHP provides the public with federal and state laws and reimbursement policies on telehealth, including those related to COVID-19. TTAC is a standalone federally designated organization. TTAC provides information on national standards, clinical application, and technology assessments.

Twelve Regional TRCs

Twelve regional TRCs are responsible for providing U.S. jurisdictions, including U.S. territories, with telehealth-related assistance. Table 1 lists each of the 12 regional TRCs with the U.S. jurisdictions that the regional TRC covers. The table also includes the publicly accessible websites for each of the TRCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional TRC</th>
<th>Covered U.S. Jurisdictions</th>
<th>Regional TRC Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>California</td>
<td><a href="http://www.caltrc.org/">http://www.caltrc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Plains Telehealth Resource and</td>
<td>Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gptrac.org/">http://www.gptrac.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartland Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma</td>
<td><a href="http://www.heartlandtrc.org/">http://www.heartlandtrc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee</td>
<td><a href="https://learntelehealth.org/">https://learntelehealth.org/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers: COVID-19 Assistance

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<th>Regional TRC Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina</td>
<td><a href="https://www.setrc.us/">https://www.setrc.us/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah</td>
<td><a href="https://southwesttrc.org/">https://southwesttrc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TexLa Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Louisiana and Texas</td>
<td><a href="https://texlatrc.org/">https://texlatrc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Midwest Telehealth Resource Center</td>
<td>Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio</td>
<td><a href="https://www.umtrc.org/">https://www.umtrc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Examples of TRCs’ work, according to the TRC Consortium, include helping stakeholders design clinical protocols, select telehealth technologies, identify federal and state funding opportunities, complete telehealth grant applications, and address licensure and credentialing barriers. Stakeholders, who seek assistance with telehealth related matters, including those related to the COVID-19 outbreak, may visit their respective regional TRC websites. The websites contain the telephone numbers and email addresses for the regional TRCs. Stakeholders may visit the TRC Consortium’s website for the telephone numbers of each of the 12 regional TRCs and to contact the TRC Consortium directly for assistance.

Author Information

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14 TRC Consortium, A Decade of Service, pp. 7 and 13.
15 To view the telephone numbers of each of the 12 regional TRCs, see TRC Consortium, Find Your TRC, https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/who-your-trc/. To reach out to the TRC directly, see TRC Consortium, Contact Us, https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/contact/.
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