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**For Immediate Release****FCC AND NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE CHAMPION CRITICAL ROLE OF  
BROADBAND IN RURAL CANCER CARE*****FCC and NCI Sign Memorandum of Understanding;  
Connect2Health Task Force Announces Appalachia Demonstration Project to Study  
Relationship Between Broadband Access, Adoption and Improved Cancer Care for Patients  
in Critical Need Counties***

WASHINGTON, December 12, 2017 – The Federal Communications Commission’s Connect2Health Task Force (C2HFCC) today announced that the FCC and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) have joined forces, signing a memorandum of understanding that will focus on how increasing broadband access and adoption in rural areas can improve the lives of rural cancer patients. As an inaugural project under the memorandum of understanding, the agencies have convened a public-private collaboration to help bridge the broadband health connectivity gap in Appalachia, taking another concrete step toward closing the digital divide.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Americans living in rural areas are still more likely to die of cancer than their counterparts in urban settings, which sets them apart from the many communities nationwide that have experienced a 20% decrease in cancer mortality over the past two decades. Initial analysis of broadband data and cancer data shows that these rural “cancer hotspots” also face major gaps in broadband access and adoption, often putting promising connected care solutions far out of reach.

In Appalachia, the cancer picture is bleaker than in other rural parts of the country. Research from University of Virginia School of Medicine has shown that between 1969 and 2011, cancer incidence declined in every region of the country except rural Appalachia, and mortality rates soared.

“The quality, length and even value of life should not be determined by where you happen to be born or live,” said Michele Ellison, Chair of the Connect2Health<sup>FCC</sup> Task Force. “And yet that’s exactly what’s happening. Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the rural parts of our country. Too many rural Americans suffer with late cancer diagnoses, unrelenting symptoms, and inadequate access to care.”

The project—titled *L.A.U.N.C.H. (Linking & Amplifying User-Centered Networks through Connected Health): A Demonstration of Broadband-Enabled Health for Rural Populations in Appalachia*—will target areas that face the dual challenge of higher cancer mortality rates and lower levels of broadband access. The initial geographic focus is planned for rural Kentucky.

Highlighting the power of public-private collaborations, current project stakeholders include cancer experts, researchers, technologists and industry representatives from the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center (a NCI-designated cancer center), the University of California, San Diego's Design Lab, and Amgen.

“Through this strategic collaboration, we will work to bring the critical connectivity piece to the cancer puzzle,” explained Ms. Ellison. “Increasingly, broadband-enabled technologies are transforming the way cancer patients and survivors better manage, monitor, and treat their symptoms—helping them to live longer, better quality lives. But for rural Americans with limited access to broadband, many of these connected care solutions are unavailable. Better connectivity holds the promise of bringing first class care and treatment to anyone, anywhere.”

“Research suggests that when patients report symptoms electronically to their care providers they are almost twice as likely to report improvements to health-related quality of life than those in a disconnected control group,” said Bradford Hesse, Ph.D., Chief, Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch, National Cancer Institute. “Electronically connected patients were also less likely to be admitted to the emergency room and had greater survival rates than patients in the control group. Collaborating with the FCC is a vital step for improving cancer outcomes for all Americans, regardless of where they live.”

The President's Cancer Panel report, [\*Improving Cancer-Related Outcomes with Connected Health\*](#), specifically urged more cross-sector collaboration among those in the healthcare, biomedical research, and technology fields as essential to the future of cancer care. Consistent with this blueprint, the multi-year, cross-sector *L.A.U.N.C.H.* project will focus on how broadband connectivity can be leveraged to improve symptom management for rural cancer patients, presenting a compelling case for greater deployment and adoption of broadband in rural areas. Symptom management is one of the key priorities of the [2016 Blue Ribbon Panel](#), a group of scientific experts created to advise the National Cancer Advisory Board.

Additional information about the FCC-NCI memorandum and the broadband health demonstration project will be available online at <https://www.fcc.gov/health/cancer>. Information about “critical need” counties at the intersection of broadband and health is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/health/maps/priority-and-ruralpriority-2017>.

The Connect2Health<sup>FCC</sup> Task Force also encourages all stakeholders interested in broadband health projects for other critical need areas—including fixed or mobile broadband providers, health technology companies, device manufacturers, and health care facilities—to contact the Task Force via e-mail at [engageC2H@fcc.gov](mailto:engageC2H@fcc.gov). It would be useful for stakeholders to include information about broadband health needs and opportunities in particular critical need areas and offer concrete proposals on how they are seeking to address them via public-private partnerships or other models.

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*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*