

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers*, WC Docket No. 18-213, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

There are many ways to pitch the benefits of broadband. But I'm hard-pressed to think of one more powerful than telemedicine. Getting and staying healthier through the use of an Internet connection resonates among all demographic groups and geographic regions—particularly rural America, where access to quality health care can be a challenge. As former Chairman Newt Minow and I wrote last year, “[r]ecent advances in communications technology could enable millions of Americans to live healthier, longer lives. . . . [We need] forward-thinking policies on telemedicine . . . [that] bring[] our health care system more fully into the digital age.”¹

Today, the FCC continues to deliver on that vision. We propose a three-year, \$100 million Connected Care Pilot program within the Universal Service Fund to help connect patients—especially veterans and low-income families—directly with their doctors using broadband technologies. If adopted, this pilot program could provide health care providers with funding needed to purchase the communications services that will support their connected care efforts and provide valuable data as we consider future policy initiatives.

These efforts are sorely needed. Americans spend \$3,000,000,000,000 on health care every year. And that doesn't even include the collateral costs that go well beyond just paying the bill. If you live in a rural area, seeing a specialist can mean missing work, driving several hours—each way—and finding a local hotel if returning home the same day isn't feasible. Even worse, some patients may choose to forego necessary medical treatments just to avoid these additional costs.

That's where connected care comes in. Telehealth lets doctors remotely monitor and treat many conditions, especially chronic ones like diabetes, opioid dependency, high-risk pregnancies, heart disease, and cancer, without all the back-and-forth travel. By supporting health care providers' investments in telehealth, the Connected Care Pilot program could extend the patient–doctor relationship beyond the hospital and help bridge both the digital and health care divides.

I've seen the promise of these kinds of services across the country, from Department of Veterans Affairs clinics in Florida and Rhode Island to private health care facilities in Delaware and Colorado. And perhaps most memorably, I visited and shared a stage with former Atlanta Hawks star and NBA Hall of Famer Dominique Wilkins, who described how a wireless device helps him monitor his health and lets him know immediately if a diabetes-related condition needs to be addressed. If it can work for the Human Highlight Film, it can work for everyone.

The future of health care is connected care. And this is a future I want the FCC to support. The \$100 million budget we've proposed for the Connected Care Pilot program is a smart investment. It will deliver a lot of value to American consumers and won't divert resources from existing USF programs. And I believe it will better inform our understanding of how telemedicine can be used, save costs, and improve health outcomes.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to Commissioner Carr for taking the lead on this important initiative and to the staff that worked hard on this item: from the Wireline Competition Bureau, Allison Baker, Rashann Duvall, Lauren Garry, Jodie Griffin, Trent Harkrader, Kris Monteith, Nicholas Page, Ryan Palmer, Joseph Schlingbaum, and Niki Wasserman; from the Office of Economics and Analytics, Octavian Carare, Giulia McHenry, Eric Ralph, Emily Talaga, and Tracy Waldon; from the Office of General Counsel, Malena Barzilai, Ashley Boizelle, Tom Johnson, Rick Mallen, and Linda Oliver; from

¹ Newton N. Minow and Ajit Pai, “In rural America, digital divide slows a vital path for telemedicine,” *Boston Globe* (May 21, 2018), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/05/20/rural-america-digital-divide-slows-vital-path-for-telemedicine/t8n4ncsfFcUASdf7XLH38J/story.html>.

the Office of Managing Director, Thomas Buckley, Mark Stephens, and Cara Voth; from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities, Maura McGowan and Sanford Williams; from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Matthew Duchesne, Barbara Esbin, and Sayuri Rajapakse; and from the Enforcement Bureau, Rizwan Chowdhry, Pamela Gallant, Jeffrey Gee, Kalun Lee, and Keith Morgan.