

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers*, WC Docket No. 18-213, Second Report and Order (June 17, 2021)

I am pleased to approve today's Order, which will facilitate the successful administration of the Connected Care Pilot Program. Combined with our selection of the second set of Pilot Projects, today's decision marks another important milestone in the Commission's efforts to expand access to telehealth services. Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has cemented telehealth as an essential part of our healthcare system. Through tens of millions of virtual visits, patients and healthcare providers have reduced in-person contacts and maintained social distancing—important measures to prevent spread of the coronavirus. Researchers at the Urban Institute found that during the first six months of the pandemic, one-third of Americans had a telehealth visit to discuss their own healthcare.<sup>1</sup> The Connected Care Pilot Program will help continue that expansion of innovative healthcare technologies in the years to come.

By reducing barriers to treatment—from missing work to traveling long distances to finding the right specialist—telehealth can help close longstanding gaps in healthcare for underserved communities. During the pandemic, researchers saw striking increases in telehealth use by low-income Americans. Between March and June 2020, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services found that telehealth visits for Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program beneficiaries increased by more than 2600 percent compared to the same period in 2019. Those beneficiaries received more than 34 million telehealth services in just four months.<sup>2</sup>

I am proud that the Connected Care Pilot Projects will target resources to low-income communities. For example, today we are announcing the selection of a Pilot project hosted by Kennedy Krieger Children's Hospital in Baltimore. Kennedy Krieger is an international leader in caring for children and young adults with pediatric developmental disabilities and disorders of the brain, spinal cord, and musculoskeletal system. Nearly \$2 million in Connected Care support will allow the hospital to provide video consultations and remote patient monitoring for patients with chronic health conditions and mental health concerns. Fully 100% of those patients will be low-income. The Connected Care Pilot Program will also help remove barriers to treatment for seniors—another core constituent of telehealth services. The Pilot Project hosted by the Heritage Clinic in California, for example, will focus specifically on low-income seniors, some of whom are veterans or experiencing homelessness. And these are just two of the many Pilot projects focused on low-income people that we announce today.

The Connected Care Pilot Program will make an enormous difference in communities around the country, but our work is far from done. Broadband can bring back the house call in a new way and expand the reach of doctors, mental health professionals, and other providers. That's a game changer—but not for the many communities that remain on the wrong side of the digital divide. In the United States, tens of millions of people either can't get online or are making great sacrifices to get connected. To fully realize the benefits of telehealth, we need to finish the work of ending internet inequality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Laura Barrie Smith & Fredric Blavin, *One in Three Adults Used Telehealth during the First Six Months of the Pandemic, but Unmet Needs for Care Persisted at 1* (2021), [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103457/one-in-three-adults-used-telehealth-during-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic-but-unmet-needs-for-care-persisted\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103457/one-in-three-adults-used-telehealth-during-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic-but-unmet-needs-for-care-persisted_1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services, *Services Delivered via Telehealth Among Medicaid & CHIP Beneficiaries During COVID-19: Preliminary Medicaid & CHIP Data Snapshot Services through June 30, 2020 at 6* (2020), <https://www.medicare.gov/resources-for-states/downloads/medicaid-chip-beneficiaries-COVID-19-snapshot-data-through-20200630.pdf>.

Many thanks to the staff in the Wireline Competition Bureau for their hard work making the Connected Care Pilot Program a success.