

Patient access to health care services delivered through telehealth

Sec. X. TELEHEALTH; CONNECTIVITY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

(a) The Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, Inc. shall consult with its Statewide Telehealth Workgroup, the Department of Public Service, and organizations representing health care providers and health care consumers to:

(1) conduct a patient connectivity needs assessment in the context of telehealth implementation, which shall identify barriers to patient connectivity, including:

(A) lack of access to telecommunications (voice) service;

(B) lack of access to mobile or residential broadband Internet access service;

(C) insufficient broadband service, including low-bandwidth connectivity, low usage allowances, or other inadequate service characteristics;

(D) lack of network equipment such as routers and wireless capability;

(E) lack of end-user devices, such as computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones;

(F) lack of patient financial resources;

(G) lack of patient digital skills; or

(H) any combination of the above.

(2) estimate the costs of providing connectivity services, network equipment, and end-user devices to patients who currently lack them.

(3) identify areas of the State that do not have access to broadband service and that are also medically underserved or have high concentrations of high-risk or vulnerable

patients, or both, and where access to telehealth services would result in improved patient outcomes or reduced health care costs, or both; and

(4) identify opportunities to use federal funds and funds from other sources to increase Vermonters' access to clinically appropriate telehealth services, including opportunities to maximize access to federal grants through strategic planning, coordination, and resource and information sharing.

(b) Based on the information obtained pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care shall pursue or assist health care providers with pursuing available funding opportunities, and shall assist patients and providers as necessary, in order to increase Vermonters' access to clinically appropriate telehealth services.

(c) In coordinating and administering the efforts described in this section, the Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, Inc. shall use federal funds to the greatest extent possible. If available federal funds are not sufficient to cover the Program's administrative costs, the Program may bill back the balance of its administrative costs in accordance with 18 V.S.A. § 9416.