

# HOW CLARKE COUNTY HOSPITAL IS EXPANDING ITS TELEHEALTH SERVICES INTO HOME MONITORING COVID-19 PATIENTS

**Clarke County Hospital** | Osceola, Iowa

On June 10, Clarke County Hospital, a 25-bed critical access hospital in Osceola, Iowa, was awarded by the Federal Communications Commission, \$170,072 as part of the agency's COVID-19 Telehealth Program.

– The program is part of the FCC's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency and will distribute \$200 million that Congress appropriated under the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) to help health care providers provide telehealth services to patients in their homes or mobile locations during the pandemic.

## Background

Telehealth isn't new to CCH. But FCC's new funding award will allow the hospital to further build on its telehealth strategy for its community.

"We have had telehealth for years - we use it with specialists and office visits," explained Evans, "But this will allow us to expand to home monitoring."

CCH will use the awarded funds for tablet computers, network upgrades and remote monitoring equipment to offer home-based access via telehealth for potential COVID-19 patients and to provide telehealth video units in patient and exam rooms to minimize provider-patient contact and preserve stockpiles of personal protective equipment.

As COVID-19 continues to grow as a public health crisis, CCH is expanding telehealth visits from home to the Clarke County Clinic (Clinic) for certain conditions

and circumstances during the national public health emergency. Patients who experience COVID-19-related symptoms or other mild conditions such as pink eye, sinus infection, rashes or anxiety can schedule during designated times telehealth visits by calling the Clinic. Additionally, home monitoring of patients with COVID-19 will be able to be monitored from home by Clarke County Hospital's care coordination team.

"The ability to monitor at home comes at a very important time in the COVID-19 crisis," explained Brian Evans, Clarke County Hospital's CEO. "It allows us to track patients who test positive and treat them if the need arises."



Offering these services via telehealth allows patients and health care workers alike to avoid unnecessary in-person visits. CCH began ramping up its telehealth program in March and will continue offering these services for the duration of the COVID-19

pandemic to ensure patients get the care they need. They hope to continue and possibly expand these services over time.

While the FCC's COVID-19 Telehealth Program is not a grant program, eligible health care providers who are approved for funding are required to submit invoicing forms and supporting documentation in order to receive reimbursements for eligible expenses and services. Applicants who receive funding are required to comply with all program rules and requirements, including applicable reporting requirements; they may be subject to compliance audits. While there is no

deadline to apply, FCC is awarding the limited funding on a rolling basis and will continue to accept and review applications until the pool is exhausted or the current COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

## Lessons Learned

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For CCH, the notice of the FCC program came at the perfect time; it already had plans in place to expand telehealth to respond to the needs of its community under the COVID-19 crisis, but not the financial resources to implement their plan. They were able to determine what resources were needed to submit an application to the FCC for support. During the pandemic, CCH actively reviewed all stimulus and grant opportunities to address the crisis in a safe and expedient way.

Based off of information being shared about the FCC program, CCH recognized the importance of being very timely in the submission of a grant. Submitting the grant on the first day the grant was open was one of the goals. There wasn't time to "fluff" the grant. It was direct and to the point, outlining specific objectives of the program and detailed information on how the dollars would be spent. During the vetting process, the FCC grant reviewers were detailed in asking questions to ensure all items met the grant criteria. The initial funds from the FCC were awarded within days of the grant "opening" to geographically hard hit areas. It was clear

that the FCC's goal was to get the funds out quickly and to locations where it could have the greatest impact.

CCH is also investigating funds from other federal sources, including the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program. This grant program helps rural communities acquire technology and training needed to connect educational and medical professionals with the teachers and medical providers who serve rural residents at the local level.

## Next Steps

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CCH plans to immediately use its new home monitoring system to track COVID-19 patients who have tested positive and are symptomatic. That way, if the patient's health deteriorates, CCH will

be able to quickly reach him or her. Similarly, CCH can use the equipment to monitor COVID-19 patients who have been discharged to ensure their continued recovery.

"The FCC award is for immediate use, but it will help us in the long term too," Evans said. "It is a catalyst to develop new and improve existing services and quality. That's what we're trying to do – improve the quality of care to the community."



# Clarke County Hospital

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