Broadband & Healthcare

West Central Wisconsin Broadband Alliance

Broadband Internet Access is a Social Determinant of Health!

- American Journal of Public Health, 2020 August

Frequently Asked Questions

What is telehealth?

Telehealth, or telemedicine, refers to a variety of healthcare communication options, administered through the internet. Communication channels can include videoconferencing or a phone call with a healthcare professional. Remote monitoring devices can also track vital signs, in real time, identifying critical trends.

How does telehealth save you time?

According to a Michigan Medicine study, an in-person visit took 80 minutes from check-in to check-out, compared to just 24 minutes for a similar video appointment to be completed. The same study also found that the amount of face-to-face time between physician and patients increased by over 25%.

What types of appointments are available via telehealth?

Telemedicine can be used for a wide variety of general and specialized appointments, such as reviewing lab test or X-Ray results, mental health therapy, dermatology, prescription management, urgent care (for minor illnesses), post-surgical follow-ups, and many more.

Changes in healthcare delivery: COVID-19 placed enormous strain on the healthcare system, however telemedicine was able to lift some of the load off of providers. Fair Health reported that from April 2019 to April 2020, telehealth insurance claims increased by 8000%. This allowed patients to avoid waiting rooms and other physical interactions, keeping everyone safer. Rural residents without access to local healthcare may experience the greatest benefit though reduced travel time and costs.

Broadband Benefits for the Individual

Communication

Improved broadband connectivity in healthcare can mean the difference between life and death for patients, says a study by Digital Planet. Researchers found that a mere 1% increase in broadband access reduced the COVID mortality rate by 19 deaths for every 100,000 cases. Improved connections also directly benefit communication between patient & doctor and Emergency Services & Hospitals. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Medicare telehealth visits increased from 840,000 in 2019 to 52.7 million in the year of 2020.

Monitoring

Monitoring technology can track how a patient's health changes over time, rather than taking a snapshot at each appointment. Not only does this provide better health outcomes, it also reduces the need for around the clock care. Examples of common Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) devices that are enabling this shift are blood pressure and heart monitors, CPAP machines, and Glucometers. New innovations are incorporating some medical devices in to everyday objects, eliminating the need to change habits.

Timeliness

Waiting for health care appointments can be stressful. A study published in the National Library of Medicine found that in-person appointments typically had a 3.5 day wait time, as opposed to a 1.8 to 2.2 day wait time for a telephone or video visit. Tele-health visits also save rural residents from spending their time and money travelling long distances.

Cost

The cost of healthcare is also a barrier for many Americans. For instance, an in-person consultation for an acute respiratory infection (bronchitis or sinus infection) is typically around $146, compared to a telehealth appointment for a similar illness being just $79. Another factor to consider is transportation costs. Increasing gas prices compounded with long travel times can be a major inhibitor to low-income patients attending appointments.

Healthcare as an Economic Driver

The Contribution of Hospital Facilities & Services to the Wisconsin Economy

2019, Steven C. Deller - UW Madison

● **Total Employment**
● **Total Employee Income**

Impact on the State
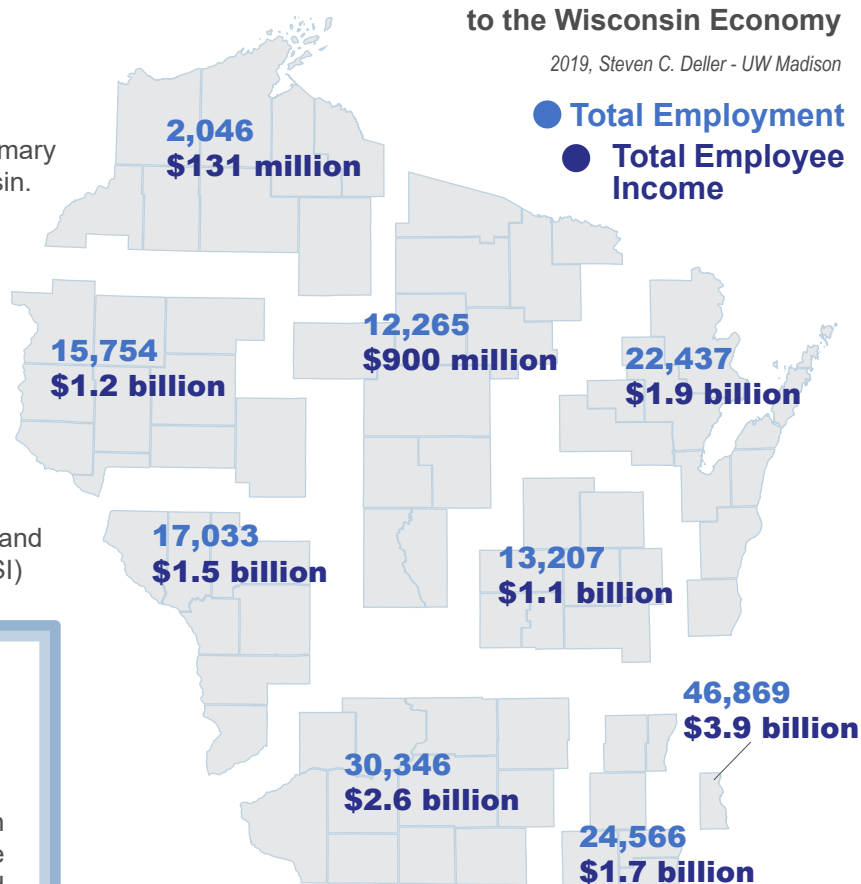
Hospitals and healthcare facilities rank as primary employers and economic drivers in the State of Wisconsin. Contributing over $119 billion in labor income, total income, other sales, and revenues to the State's economy. The jobs provided by this sector provide stability, and account for over 15% of Wisconsin's total employment, according to the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA).

Impact on the Region

Healthcare and social assistance is the second largest industry in West Central Wisconsin with nearly 32,000 jobs, $2.4 billion in gross regional product, and over 2,250 payrolled business locations in 2021. (EMSI)

2,046
$131 million

15,754
$1.2 billion

12,265
$900 million

22,437
$1.9 billion

17,033
$1.5 billion

13,207
$1.1 billion

46,869
$3.9 billion

30,346
$2.6 billion

24,566
$1.7 billion

Emergency Management

Emergency services are on the front line of the healthcare industry, making split second decisions to save a life. Broadband connectivity can play a critical role in optimizing a paramedics time with their patient. This includes the use of Smart Ambulances, real-time communications with emergency room specialists to start critical triage & treatment, and location-optimized route planning to get the closest ambulances to-and-from the scene.

≡ FIRSTNET™ The 9/11 Commission, created to investigate the terrorist attacks, identified several communication challenges during the tragedy. This led to the establishment of a single, interoperable network for public safety communication.

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) was established in 2012, collaborating closely with public safety stakeholders to create the first ever nationwide broadband network dedicated to saving lives and protecting communities.

Behavioral Health

Mental or behavioral healthcare has been an area of growing concern across the country. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), 3 out of 10 Americans reported symptoms of consistent depression or anxiety disorder since April of 2020. Half of US adults reporting a mental illness said they were not receiving treatment (Mental Health America).

Hudson Hospital & Clinic

Rural communities often lack resources or access to adequate behavioral health support. With the goal of closing this gap in treatment, the Hudson Hospital & Clinic in St. Croix County, Wisconsin is developing the "Emergency Department Behavioral Health Televideo Program". Serving eight hospitals across three separate counties, this program uses broadband technology to virtually provide behavioral health treatment and support to the area.