

TELEHEALTH IN THE NORTHEAST

FIELD REPORT: SAMPLE STAKEHOLDER CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS, & LESSONS LEARNED

NORTHEAST TELEHEALTH RESOURCE CENTER (GRANT GA5RH37459)

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USING TELEHEALTH TO ADDRESS SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH IN THE FQHC ENVIRONMENT

Islands Community Medical Services (ICMS), a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) located on Vinalhaven, Maine, has been a telehealth innovator for more than a decade. As their Director of Operations, Christina Quinlan will tell you, when you serve one of the most remote populations in the country with limited space and resources, telehealth is an absolute necessity for meeting community health needs. While FQHCs have historically been very limited in their ability to use telehealth for Medicare patients, ICMS has leveraged Maine’s favorable Medicaid and commercial payer telehealth policies to address key gaps in access to a variety of medical and behavioral health services, and to help with some of the island community’s biggest challenges, such as limited transportation, access to social and judicial services that are located on the mainland, such as WIC, Medicaid enrollment, parole consults, family reunification, and more.

Telehealth is ‘The Best Tool’ in the Healthcare Toolbox for FQHCs

For an FQHC serving an island community off the Maine coast, telehealth gives providers an important platform for addressing not only gaps in care, but other factors that contribute to negative health outcomes.



Source: ThinkStock

By Eric Wicklund



With the arrival of COVID-19 and the federal Public Health Emergency, the door was opened wide for FQHCs to provide access to vital healthcare services for their Medicare patients via telehealth, and ICMS wasted no time in jumping on that opportunity. The team quickly adjusted workflows and began providing additional types of services via telehealth, across their entire payer mix. While some patients were a bit hesitant to try telehealth at first, or had inadequate connectivity for live video consults at home, these challenges were quickly addressed and the benefits were two-fold: patients had uninterrupted access to healthcare and community services, and the health center was able to maintain revenues necessary to continue operations. Early in the pandemic, they were able to convert a large majority of their visits to telehealth thanks to federal and state policy expansions, and like many others across the U.S. are now planning ahead for a long-term strategy which balances telehealth and in-person visits with the needs of their community.

The Islands team recently shared their innovative approach and lessons learned with regional stakeholders during the NETRC/MATRC Virtual Telehealth Conference in July, 2020 (slide deck attached in EHB). See the recent mHealth Intelligence article: [Telehealth is the Best Tool in the Healthcare Toolbox for FQHCs](#), in follow up to the Virtual Conference Series.

“We know that value-based medicine isn’t a matter of if, (but) a matter of when,” she said. Focusing on reducing health disparities will be a huge part of that platform, and “the only way we can do it is through telehealth.”