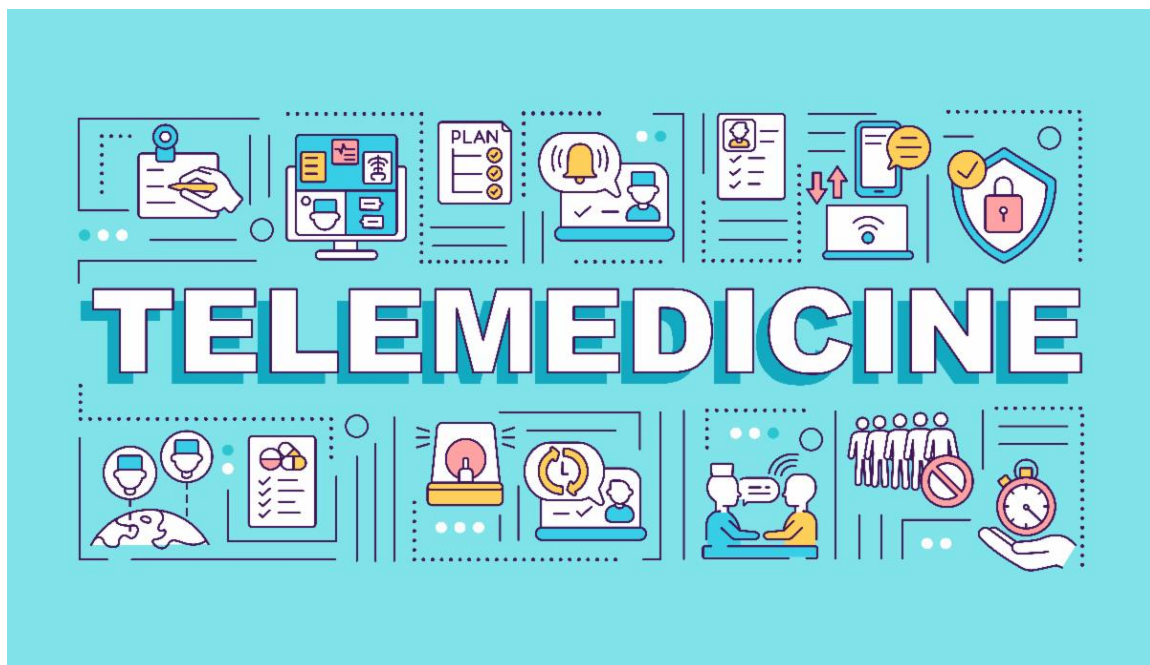




Greetings Northwest Region:



NCTRC Annual Report Now Available

[The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers \(NCTRC\) 2024 Annual Report](#) is now available! This year's report highlights key advancements in telehealth accessibility and innovation, with a strong focus on serving underserved and rural communities. As interest in the field grows, the Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) remain steadfast in their commitment to offering vital technical assistance, training, and resources to the nation's healthcare system and its citizens. The annual report details all 14 TRCs our activities and accomplishments in 2024. Read the full report [here](#).



Regional News

Tai Baker Joins the NRTRC Board

Welcome to our newest NRTRC board member, Tai Baker, MS, representing Wyoming! Tai is stepping into the role previously filled by Dr. Lisa Finkelstein, who is retiring from practice after serving as a board member since 2019.

Tai is the Senior Program Manager of the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND) at the University of Wyoming (UW) and Secretary of the Wyoming Telehealth Consortium. At WIND, which she joined in 2019, she manages the Inclusive Health Programs, including Project SCOPE, a program that supports children of the opioid epidemic. She also manages the Equality State Research Network, Wyoming's community- and practice-based research network, and the Wyoming Telehealth Network.



Creating and sustaining strong health systems is a priority for Tai, as shown by her work with Project ECHO networks across health and education where she supports the implementation of networks across the nation through the UW ECHO Super Hub. She is passionate about implementing core rural and public health programs and engaging with community partners across the state of Wyoming.

Prior to joining WIND, Tai worked for four years at Albany County, Wyoming as the grants manager and for six years at the Wyoming Department of Health implementing core public health programs throughout Wyoming, specifically in communicable disease prevention. Tai graduated with a B.S in Criminal Justice and Psychology from the University of Wyoming and a M.S. in Health Service Administration through the School of Pharmacy from the University of Wyoming.

Tai is a proud Laramie resident and loves to find adventure with her family of five. During her spare time she serves on a variety of community committees, including the Laramie Main Street Organization, the Pilot Hill Land Purchase Finance Committee, and she is an alum of Leadership Laramie.



Success Story: Partnership with the NRTRC Pays Off!

By the [University of Washington/Harborview Medical Center Behavioral Health Institute \(BHI\)](#)

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Behavioral Health Institute at Harborview Medical Center (part of [UW Medicine](#) in Seattle, WA) was asked by

the Washington State Health Care Authority to help train community-based providers on best practices for telebehavioral health care.

After providing an initial series in 2020, we built on the knowledge gained and created a new series accredited by Continuing Medical Education (CME) and National Association of Social Workers (NASW): “TeleBehavioral Health Training 101,” a six-session webinar series covering foundational topics, and an ongoing monthly webinar series taking a deeper dive into a variety of topics related to telehealth and virtual behavioral healthcare.

To make this content more accessible, we reached out to Nicki and Jaleen at the NRTRC to partner on utilizing the content from the webinars to create online courses: now available as TeleBehavioral Health [101](#), [201](#), [301](#), and [401](#) (501 coming soon) on the [NRTRC online telehealth training catalog](#) with over 20,000 learner engagements and completions.

In 2024, NRTRC also partnered with us on content development, speaker recruitment, topics, and outreach for the ongoing webinar series. The results were astounding: webinar registrations increased from a total of 3,205 for the 2023 series to 5,852 in 2024, with registrants from all across the country!

The NRTRC has helped to raise awareness about these free telemental/telebehavioral health webinars and keep attendees engaged month after month. New participants are welcome! Please visit [TeleBehavioral Health – Harborview Behavioral Health Institute](#) for more information about these and other courses along with resources for healthcare professionals caring for people experiencing behavioral health issues.

Tell Us Your Story! For more success stories, [see all our Success Stories here](#). If you'd like to share your experience, [submit a Success Story here](#).

News

In Case You Missed It: CCHP Released “Federal Telehealth Policy FAQs”

The [Center for Connected Health Policy \(CCHP\)’s newsletter](#) included a summary of frequently asked questions (FAQs) along with CCHP’s responses, based on requests for technical assistance that CCHP has recently received as well as questions asked during the January 9 CCHP and [National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers \(NCTRC\) hosted webinar on federal telehealth policy](#).

Key topics covered in CCHP’s FAQ resource include:

- Medicare Telehealth Waivers Extended:
The recent Continuing Resolution (HR 10545) extends key Medicare telehealth waivers until March 31, 2025, including waived originating site location requirements, coverage for audio-only visits, expanded provider eligibility, and flexibility for mental health services.



- **Audio-Only Telehealth Changes:** CMS removed specific audio-only codes (99441-99443) in the 2025 Physician Fee Schedule (PFS) but clarified that codes 99202-99215 can be used with appropriate modifiers for reimbursement.
- **In-Person Mental Health Visit Requirement Delayed:** The waiver delaying the in-person visit requirement for telehealth mental health services has been extended but may return on April 1, 2025, if no further action is taken.
- **New Telehealth Codes Not Adopted by Medicare:** CMS declined to adopt most of the AMA's new 98000-series telehealth codes, except for 98016, which replaces G2012. Medicaid and private payers may handle these codes differently.
- **Controlled Substance Prescriptions via Telehealth:** The DEA extended its waiver through 2025, allowing telehealth prescribing of controlled substances without a prior in-person visit. However, state-specific prescribing rules may still apply. Additionally, the DEA has adopted two new final rules creating exceptions from in-person visit requirements for veterans' affairs and prescribing buprenorphine. They have also proposed a rule for a special telemedicine registration.

Uncertainty Surrounding CMS Telehealth Guidance Amid Administrative Delays



The answer to some questions regarding CMS telehealth policy remains unclear as we await further guidance from CMS. Compounding the uncertainty, an [article](#) posted to the [Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medical \(PALTmed\) Association](#) website on January 27, 2025, indicates that CMS has yet to

release temporary guidance for Medicare administrative contractors (MACs) on the telehealth billing extensions contained in [HR 10545](#) (many of which are bulleted above). The delay, coupled with the new administration's two-week health communication freeze, has added to the uncertainty and could mean a longer wait for clarity on lingering telehealth questions. CMS is only making exceptions for "mission critical" announcements, leaving it uncertain whether telehealth guidance will be issued before March 31, 2025 when the current telehealth extensions are set to expire.

For more details, access CCHP's full [FAQ newsletter write-up](#).

CMS Provides Billing Instructions for Opioid Treatment Programs (OTP) Telecommunications Add-On Codes

In the [2025 Final Physician Fee Schedule](#), the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) finalized important updates for Opioid Treatment Programs (OTPs) aligning with [regulations](#) previously adopted by the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)

These changes aim to enhance access to care for individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD) by expanding telehealth options.

Key updates include:

- Periodic assessments may now be conducted via audio-only technology on a permanent basis if live video is unavailable, as long as they meet all applicable SAMHSA and DEA requirements.
- The OTPs intake add-on code (G2076) can now be billed when using live video for the initiation of methadone treatment.

As a result of these changes, CMS has updated its [Opioid Treatment Program \(OTP\) webpage](#) to reflect proper billing practices. OTPs should use the following HCPCS add-on codes when treating eligible patients:

- G2076—Used to initiate buprenorphine or methadone treatment via two-way interactive audio-video or audio-only technology when video is unavailable.
- G2077—Covers periodic patient assessments via audio-only technology when video is unavailable.
- G2080—Applies to additional counseling or therapy provided via audio-only technology when video is unavailable.

For more details on the finalized policy, review the [2025 Final Physician Fee Schedule](#). To learn more about billing and G-codes for OTPs, visit the [CMS Opioid Treatment Program webpage](#).

Shared from the Center For Connected Health Policies (CHHP) February newsletter

Grant Funding Opportunities

USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants

This [competitive program](#) helps rural communities use advanced telecommunications technology to connect to each other—and the world—overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density. USDA encourages you to consider projects that promote equity and economic opportunity in rural America, specifically those that advance these key priorities:



- Helping rural communities recover economically through more and better market opportunities and through improved infrastructure
- Ensuring that all rural residents have fair access to Rural Development programs and benefits from Rural Development funded projects
- Reducing climate pollution and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change through economic support to rural communities

Deadline: March 6, 2025

Refer to the [funding page](#) on the NRTRC website for additional updated grant opportunities.



Events to Bookmark in 2025

February

NCTRC Webinar—Advancing Telehealth Integration in Patient Care

Feb 20 @ 12 pm–1 p.m.

Organizer: [National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers](#)

As healthcare evolves, virtual nursing emerges as a transformative solution addressing workforce challenges, improving patient outcomes, and integrating seamlessly into telehealth ecosystems. This presentation explores the state of nursing today, common care models, and the market forces driving innovation. Attendees will gain insights into the history and current applications of virtual nursing, the steps to establish and implement programs, and the critical role of virtual nurses in retention, recruitment, and cultural shifts within healthcare organizations. Join us to uncover the potential benefits, business case development, and the future of virtual nursing in shaping a modern care delivery system.

TeleBehavioral Health 2025: Telehealth and TeleBehavioral/TeleMental Health Policy Update

Feb 21 @ 12 p.m.–1 p.m.

Organizer: [University of Washington Behavioral Health Institute](#)

Our presenter will provide an overview and update on post-public health emergency policy impacting the provision of and reimbursement for telebehavioral health services.

March

TeleBehavioral Health 2025: Digital Behavioral Health Therapeutics—Is There an App for That, and Can AI Be Your Next Therapist?

Mar 21, 2025 @ 12 p.m.–1 p.m.

Organizer: [University of Washington Behavioral Health Institute](#)

Digital apps are growing rapidly and gaining ground with FDA approval as digital therapeutics that can be prescribed to patients. But with thousands to choose from, how do we know which ones are worthwhile? And what do we know about AI's potential to replace therapists?

Northwest Rural Health Conference

Mar 24–Mar 26

Spokane, WA

Organizer: [Multiple Organizations](#)

The Northwest Rural Health Conference brings together rural healthcare professionals and subject matter experts from the field to collaborate, educate, and brainstorm innovative ways to bring quality care to our rural communities.

April

TeleBehavioral Health 2025 Care for TBI Patients over Telehealth

Apr 18, 2025 @ 12 p.m.–1 p.m.

Organizer: [University of Washington Behavioral Health Institute](#)

The TeleBehavioral Health 2025 Training Series is a free twelve-part webinar series open to anyone providing services to individuals who live with mental health and substance use issues. This Zoom-based series takes place the third Friday of each month, January through December 2025, from 11 am – 12 pm (PT). You are invited to attend all webinars, but you will need to register for each webinar separately.

May

52nd Annual 2025 National Association for Rural Mental Health Conference

May 1–3

Anchorage, AK

Organizer: [National Association for Rural Mental Health](#)

The 2025 National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH) Annual Conference will be held in person at the Hotel Captain Cook, Anchorage, AK, on Thursday, May 1 – Saturday, May 3, 2025.

This year's conference theme is "Stronger Together: Weaving Cultural Diversity and Strengths to Support Mental Well-Being" and will highlight speakers and workshops focused on rural policy, clinical practice, and effective leadership. Attendees will also hear about the resilient strategies and innovative solutions speakers have employed in their communities over the last several years.

Join us for a pre-conference and two-day conference as we convene to share insights, learn from one another, and discuss the future of rural mental health services.

ATA Nexus 2025

May 3–6

New Orleans, LA

Organizer: [American Telemedicine Association](#)

Nexus 2025 will convene leading healthcare delivery organizations and the solution providers that support them, government agencies, payors, and other stakeholders to share critical insights and build action plans that enable virtual care as an indispensable care modality and permanent part of healthcare delivery. Nexus 2025 is where the future of healthcare is being built.

Forum on Rural Population Health & Health Equity

May 19–21

Seaside, OR

Organizer: [Oregon Office of Rural Health](#)

Save the date! The next forum will be held in person May 19-21, 2025, at the Seaside Civic & Convention Center in Seaside, Oregon.

The forum aims to strengthen community health in rural Oregon by gathering experts, leaders and practitioners to share best practices, emerging models and strategies, resources, case studies and innovations focused on enhancing community health from an array of perspectives.

The forum welcomes attendees from across the healthcare continuum, including health care workers and administrators, coordinated care organizations, community-based organizations, local and state officials, local leaders, policymakers, public health officials, and anyone invested in promoting rural community health.

Net Inclusion 2025

May 20–22

Gila River, AZ

Organizer: [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)

The Net Inclusion conference has been a staple in the digital inclusion community since 2016, bringing hundreds of practitioners, advocates, academics, internet service providers, and policymakers together to share their knowledge and discuss:

- Local, state, Tribal, and federal policies impacting digital equity
- Digital inclusion best practices from across the country, including new sessions on AI and digital equity, rural and Tribal outreach, and securing funding for sustainability
- Digital inclusion programming, including the latest on digital navigators, digital health equity, accessibility, serving diverse populations, and community-centered work.

Do You Provide Healthcare or Services via Telehealth?



NRTRC's [Find Telehealth](#) is available to help patients and providers find in-person and telehealth care along with locations to have telehealth visits. Turn on the map's TAPs button to view sites.

[Click Here to Update Information on Your Practice](#)
[Click Here to Add a TAP](#)



Northwest Regional State Telehealth Website Links

- [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare](#)
- [Montana Telehealth Alliance](#)
- [Utah Telehealth Network](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Washington State Telehealth Collaborative](#)
- [Wyoming Telehealth Network](#)



Telehealth Resources

- [Telehealth Tools and Resources](#): Find up-to-date telehealth tools and resources
- [Professional Development](#): Visit NRTRC's catalog of online telehealth training courses
- [Updated legislation and regulations](#): Keep up with regulations and proposed legislation for the states of the Northwest Region
- [Research](#): Find current research opportunities, research articles, and survey results

Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center

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Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center

101 Wasatch Drive | Salt Lake City, UT 84112 US

www.nrtrc.org | Phone [\(801\) 587-0349](tel:8015870349) | Toll Free [\(833\) 747-0643](tel:8337470643)

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