

Cares Act Covid-19 Telehealth Projects Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION: In April 2020, the Montana Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (MGWEP) applied for CARES Act funding to use telehealth to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. As a GWEP based in a College of Health with limited clinical facilities, MGWEP turned to its community partners to pursue this opportunity. The program ended April 30, 2020, and 18 months later MGWEP queried its partners to determine the sustainability of their projects.

METHODS: A qualitative scripted telephone interview was used to determine the status of the telehealth projects. Each partner was asked about barriers to continuation, changes in project partners, funding, and individuals served.

RESULTS: Five of the six projects are ongoing 18 months after the funding ended.

DISCUSSION: MGWEP was challenged to respond to the funding opportunity on short notice and with no direct access to clinical facilities. Our partners provided such access but led to the question of sustainability for multiple projects. Four of these projects have been successful with ongoing funding, one moderately so, and one did not continue. Depending on future opportunities that arise, MGWEP is confident that it will once again be able to collaborate with community partners to make a meaningful and sustainable difference in their communities.

Does providing several community partners with small amounts of CARES Act funding produce sustainable results?



Specific results 18 months after funding ended:

- **Missoula Aging Service:** Lifelong Connections provides WiFi-enabled tablets to older adults to reduce social isolation and improve access to health care via telehealth. Since funding ended, 10 participants were added, with expansion into rural areas. New partners added additional funding.
- **Skaggs School of Pharmacy:** Faculty and students continue to use a simulated EHR platform, providing training to an additional 99 interdisciplinary students and 21 instructors in a virtual environment after MGWEP funding ended.
- **RiverStone Health Clinic:** Conducted telephone survey of over 300 older adult patients as to their preferences regarding telehealth which led to successful implementation of the technology. At follow up, telehealth was primarily serving behavioral health patients.
- **Partnership Health Center:** Supported two telehealth coordinators to provide telehealth training and coordination for 640 Medicare patients and 210 PHC staff. At follow up, telehealth was primarily serving behavioral health patients.
- **Montana Alzheimer's Association:** Three of the five long-term care communities continued to use WiFi-enabled tablets to enhance communication between residents and family members. However, staffing issues threaten program continuation.
- **Mountain Pacific Quality Health:** Difficulty in recruiting individuals for training as telehealth patient navigators led to discontinuation of the program when funding ended.

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