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# SCTA Quarterly Report

## CY20 Quarter 3

Progress achieved on the 2020 SCTA Strategic Plan  
July - September 2020

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# Executive Summary

In the third quarter of calendar year 2020 (CY20Q3), South Carolina Telehealth Alliance (SCTA) partners remained focused on leveraging telehealth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **SCTA regional hubs** and **SC Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)** continued to build out telehealth programs to provide quality patient care from a distance, and the SCTA continues to offer a free clinic-level instance of **Doxy.Me** for any provider in the state. As demand for telehealth education increased alongside clinical programs in CY20Q3, both **Palmetto Care Connections (PCC)** and **SC Area Healthcare Education Consortium (SC AHEC)** focused their efforts on ensuring up-to-date information was available across the state. PCC also continued its work advocating at the state and federal level for broadband accessibility, an important issue as many SC citizens continued to work, learn, and access healthcare from their homes. Finally, the **SCTA Sustainability Workgroup** convened to discuss and align on policy advocacy approaches to permanently expand telehealth coverage and reimbursement post-COVID-19, and these discussions will continue through CY20Q4.

This report provides further details on the activities outlined above and notes other progress and accomplishments by SCTA partners during CY20Q3. Updates are grouped within the driving strategies outlined in the SCTA 2020 Strategic Plan, though they do not follow the specific timeline of deliverables within the 2020 plan due priority changes resulting from COVID-19.

## Mission

Improve the health of all South Carolinians through telehealth.

## Values

Patient centered  
Quality  
Collaboration  
Sustainability  
Accountability

## Vision

Telehealth will grow to support delivery of health care to all South Carolinians with an emphasis on underserved and rural communities. It will facilitate, coordinate and make more accessible quality care, education and research that are patient centered, reliable and timely. Our state will become recognized nationally for telehealth that is uniquely collaborative, valuable and cost effective.

## Value Proposition

Telehealth in South Carolina will deliver high value through productive collaboration.

# Driving Strategy 1

Deploy a coordinated, open-access telehealth network in South Carolina.

In CY20Q3, telehealth technology champions from **MUSC Health, Palmetto Care Connections, Beaufort Memorial Hospital, McLeod Health, Tidelands Health, and CareSouth Carolina** came together to discuss their experiences, successes, and challenges leveraging telehealth technologies in new and innovative ways during COVID-19. **The SCTA IT User Group** members discussed how their respective institutions made quick decisions around equipment deployment, hardware shortages, and onboarding large numbers of providers to telehealth platforms in a matter of weeks. Convening the group provided a forum to share common experiences, challenges, and recommendations. Moving forward the group plans to convene more regularly to share experiences, discuss technology trends, and for continued statewide collaboration.

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# Driving Strategy 2

Understand and effectively respond to the needs of users of telehealth with an emphasis on the rural and underserved.

**Palmetto Care connections (PCC)** continues to lead the SCTA's efforts to expand broadband access for health care providers in South Carolina's rural communities through state and federal advocacy efforts and broadband subsidy application assistance. In 2020, PCC has received funding commitment letters from the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) totaling over \$17 million funds and has filed for 617 new circuits in the state. Additionally, PCC has remained at the fore of advocating for increased broadband at both the state and federal level, something all the more important as health care, education, and workforce have moved increasingly toward virtual options amidst COVID. An example of this advocacy took place August, when PCC, USC, and other SCTA partners hosted Senator Lindsay Graham for a forum on broadband in Columbia. Looking forward to CY20Q4, PCC will administer a survey to SC Broadband Consortium members as it prepares to apply for the upcoming FCC Connected Care Pilot Program on behalf of eligible SC health care providers.

# Driving Strategy 3

Build and scale telehealth clinical services and programs that expand access to care.

SCTA Partners continue to implement and expand telehealth models to support patients and health care workers across care settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. During CY20Q3, **McLeod Health** equipped patient rooms for pulmonology ICU monitoring, increasing patient access to a critical care pulmonologist across multiple McLeod Health locations in the Pee Dee region. McLeod Health also continues to see growth in its patient-family connection program, where families can visit virtually with loved ones who are inpatient as visitation restrictions continue. **Prisma Health** expanded access to inpatient neurology, infectious disease, cardiovascular, and critical care/pulmonary consults to four additional facilities, and **MUSC Health's** COVID-19 health care worker exposure reduction program, which uses real-time audio-video connection to monitor COVID-positive patients in their hospital rooms, continued at the Charleston campus. From March through August, the program realized an estimated \$135,000 in Personal Protective Equipment Savings, and is currently exploring a model for other care settings due to its success in cost-savings and staff satisfaction.

Earlier in the year, health care providers across South Carolina quickly transitioned many ambulatory operations to telehealth to provide quality patient care while adhering to social distancing best practices. Although some ambulatory services have transitioned back to in-person care, telehealth continues to be in high demand during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. **MUSC Health** converted over 2,000 providers to virtual visits in the early months of the pandemic, and during CY20Q3 the program focused on stabilization and standardization for improved efficiency and long-term sustainability. **Prisma Health** has also expanded video visit capability across its organization, increasing access to high-acuity urgent care, complex pediatric care, behavioral health, and COVID-19 follow up visits. As reported in previous quarterly reports, in April the SCTA began offering a free statewide clinic-level instance of **Doxy.Me**. Since the launch of the instance, almost 1,400 user accounts have been requested, and in CY20Q3, SCTA Doxy.Me users attended nearly 31,000 telehealth sessions. The SCTA is working on a model to continue providing the free offering after COVID-19 due to the positive feedback from providers across the state.

Direct-to-Patient telehealth has come to the forefront as partners quickly deployed telehealth services to patients in their homes, as noted in the efforts outlined above. In addition to ambulatory care services, **MUSC Health**, **Prisma Health**, and **McLeod Health** also experienced high volumes of Virtual Urgent Care Visits During CY20Q3 as they continued to leverage their respective platforms to provide virtual COVID-19 screenings and referrals to testing as appropriate. Utilizing the existing Virtual Urgent Care infrastructure in this way allowed for seamless screening-to-testing processes while mitigating unnecessary risk of exposure in the clinic setting.

As the 2020-2021 academic year approached, school-based telehealth programs adapted models to best meet the needs of students as districts prepared their reopening strategies. **MUSC Health's** school-based telehealth program created a hybrid care delivery model to connect to students in their homes as necessary, while sustaining the existing school-based model for students learning in-person. **Prisma Health** partnered with **Greenville County Schools**, leveraging school-issued Chromebooks to provide telehealth services into students' homes, and Wi-Fi-equipped school busses were also deployed to certain geographic areas for increased access. In the Pee Dee, **McLeod Health** built upon its successful program launch from last year by expanding its school-based telehealth program to two new schools in **Florence County**.

## Driving Strategy 4

Broaden mental health and related telehealth clinical services and programs to increase access to care.

During CY20Q3, **South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)**, **SC Department of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Services (SC DAODAS)**, **MUSC Health**, **Prisma Health**, and other partners continued to provide vital access to mental health care via telehealth, and began deploying new programs to directly address the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020, SCDMH welcomed **The Regional Medical Center** of Orangeburg and Calhoun Counties (TRMC) as the newest participating hospital in the **Emergency Department Telepsychiatry Program**. SCDMH now supports a total of 23 participating hospitals of varying sizes through this program.

During COVID-19 SCDMH's **Community Telepsychiatry Program** rapidly enhanced its community-based and school mental health services by providing services directly to patients' homes. In CY20Q3, the program provided over 56,000 telehealth services. In August, SCDMH and SC DAODAS worked together to launch **Tu Apoyo** (*Your Support*), a free and anonymous Spanish-language toll-free hotline to support South Carolina's Spanish-speaking population. The program is an expansion of the **SC-HOPES** resource launched in June to provide support for people feeling overwhelmed due to COVID-19 challenges and/or other life stressors.

In September SCDMH was awarded a grant to deploy nine telehealth-equipped mobile units to rural counties in South Carolina, which will provide mental health and basic primary care to communities with limited healthcare access. The program is slated for implementation in the coming year.

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## Driving Strategy 5

Conduct statewide education, training and promotion to providers and the public to accelerate and spread adoption of telehealth.

**PCC** and **SC AHEC** continue to champion telehealth education efforts in South Carolina through the creation and dissemination of educational material. With telehealth programs growing quickly in the state during the COVID-19 crisis, access to telehealth educational material became increasingly important. In July, PCC partnered with the **Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center** to host a webinar titled *A Beginner's Guide to Telehealth during COVID-19*. During CY20Q3, SC AHEC focused on ensuring existing telehealth education materials were up to date with recent changes to telehealth policy during COVID-19 and the Public Health Emergency declaration. During September, SC AHEC developed and recorded a **Telehealth 101** sessions in preparation for the **PCC Virtual Telehealth Summit** in October. Throughout CY20Q3, PCC, SC AHEC, and the Summit Planning Committee worked diligently to prepare for the Virtual 2020 Telehealth Summit, which will be including as part of CY20Q4 reporting.

## Driving Strategy 6

Develop a telehealth organization structure that encourages and facilitates statewide collaboration among providers in the delivery of health care, education and research.

Continued communication and ongoing stakeholder engagement remain a priority for the SCTA, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. SCTA Workgroups continued to convene virtually throughout CY20Q3, and the **SCTA Advisory Council** held its Q3 meeting in August. In September, the **SCTA** and **PCC** launched a campaign to collect South Carolinians' voices of support and telehealth stories. The **Share Your Story campaign** provides respondents with an option to sign on to the SCTA Position statement for continued telehealth coverage post COVID-19, as well as an option to share their own story of how they have utilized telehealth to provide services or received health care services via telehealth during the pandemic. Respondents can provide consent for their stories to be shared with policymakers and the general public to support telehealth advocacy efforts in South Carolina. Looking forward, the SCTA will spend Q4 engaging SCTA Partners in rethinking the strategic planning process and format for the year to come. More detail around strategic planning efforts will be reported on in the CY20Q4 report.

## Driving Strategy 7

Establish the value case for telehealth through robust assessment and rigorous analysis of telehealth outcomes.

Robust evaluation of SCTA telehealth programs has continued throughout CY2020, led by **MUSC's Telehealth Center of Excellence (COE)** and the **University of South Carolina (USC)**. This past quarter, the SCTA established a partnership with the **SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare (CRPH)** housed at USC in efforts to centralize and coordinate the support of USC telehealth programs and research. Working alongside the MUSC COE, the CRPH has already begun researching telehealth barriers and facilitators to telehealth adoption among rural and primary health care practices during COVID-19. This past quarter, the MUSC COE also published two peer review articles, one focused the population health impact of MUSC's telestroke network and the other highlighting early outcomes from MUSC's COVID-19 telehealth interventions:

- Ford, D., Harvey, J. B., McElligott, J., King, K., Simpson, K.N., Valenta, S., Warr, E. H., Walsh, T., Debenham, E., Teasdale, C., Meystre, S., Obeid, J. S., & Lenert, L. A. (2020). Leveraging Health System Telehealth and Informatics Infrastructure to Create a Continuum of Services for COVID-19 Screening, Testing, and Treatment. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association: JAMIA*, ocaa157.
- Simpson, A. N., Harvey, J. B., DiLembo, S. M., Debenham, E., Holmstedt, C. A., Robinson, C. O., Simpson, K. N., Almallouhi, E., & Ford, D. W. (2020). Population Health Indicators Associated with a Statewide Telestroke Program. *Telemedicine journal and e-health : the official journal of the American Telemedicine Association*, 26(9), 1126-1133.

Additionally, the SCTA, in collaboration with the South Carolina Clinical and Translational Research Institute, awarded **three telehealth research pilots** as part of the SCTA's ongoing efforts to foster telehealth research across the state. Pilot programs awarded include:

- **Health Chat: Connecting with Underserved Adolescents to Monitor Healthy Lifestyle Goals via Mobile Health** (Christine SanGiovanni, MD | MUSC)
- **Telehealth Management of Complex ADHD** (Silvia Pereira-Smith, MD | MUSC)
- **Utilizing Telehealth to Engage Youth in Foster Care in Follow Up Care** (Elizabeth Wallis, MD | MUSC)

## Driving Strategy 8

Demonstrate to legislators, payers, providers, and the public the impact of telehealth on improving access, quality, and affordability.

**South Carolina ETV (SCETV)** continues to lead the **MyTelehealth** campaign, producing stories that help bring awareness of telehealth programs across the state. During CY20Q3 the MyTelehealth team produced five stories to showcase the use and importance of telehealth programs and infrastructure in South Carolina:

- How the Coronavirus Pandemic is Forcing Healthcare Provider to Reimagine the Way they Deliver Care
- Millions of Patients Now Able to access Healthcare After Lifting of Telehealth Restrictions
- New support line created for people struggling with pandemic hardships
- National leaders working to expand broadband in South Carolina
- New research to help injured troops using technology

With **Telehealth Awareness Week (TAW2020)** approaching in October, SCETV launched an online toolkit with updated statistics to reflect increased telehealth utilization during the COVID-19 pandemic. SCETV was also able to leverage a few patient and provider quotes from the Share Your Story campaign referenced in Strategy 6 to create impactful infographics for statewide use during TAW2020.

Telehealth sustainability and advocacy efforts continued in CY20Q3 with increased interest from SCTA partners in supporting federal and state legislation to maintain telehealth reimbursement coverage beyond the current public health emergency. In July, the **SCTA Sustainability Workgroup** met to discuss avenues for policy action, including both introducing state telehealth coverage legislation and alternative advocacy opportunities for engaging public and private payers. These approaches will continue to be explored through CY20Q4, with initial activity already occurring, including signing on to support various federal telehealth bills and submitting comment to CMS on telehealth provisions in the proposed 2021 Physician Fee Schedule.

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