



HEALTH SYSTEMS DIVISION

Kate Brown, Governor



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Date: April 28, 2021

To: Linn, Benton Lincoln System of Care Executive

From: Chelsea Holcomb
Child and Family Behavioral Health Unit, on behalf of the System of Care Advisory Council State Agencies Standing Committee

Subject: System of Care Barrier – Lack of Internet access in rural areas for distance learning and telehealth, dated 12/7/2020

Thank you for the system barrier that came to the System of Care Advisory State Agencies Standing Committee in December.

Response

The State of Oregon has been working to increase access in many ways across the state and especially recognizing the increased focus on this need during COVID restrictions and OHA, ODE and ODHS are involved in many of these programs. Broadband access is a topic of concern across the state and the [Oregon Broadband Office](#) published a [report](#), November 2020, and runs the [Rural Broadband Capacity Program](#) and the [Broadband Advisory Council](#).

The System of Care State Agencies Standing Committee notes that whilst there is much work being done to address the challenges of technology and connectivity around the state, there are still areas that experience challenges. The [interactive map](#) highlights these largely rural areas of the state and your region.

Work in progress includes:

- Governor Brown's [proposed 2021-2023 budget](#) includes \$118 million to fund expanded access to broadband statewide, including Community Broadband investments to expand broadband infrastructure, investments in broadband infrastructure for schools, and an Urban Connectivity program through OHCS that will create a subsidy for urban areas with cost barriers.
- There are a few broadband bills still alive in session, including SB 615 which would establish a low-income broadband assistance fund to supplement other state efforts
- On February 25th 2021, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted, through a unanimous vote, the establishment of the [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#), which is a \$3.2 billion federally funded effort to increase internet accessibility and affordability to underserved communities throughout the country. The program will offer monthly discounts for broadband service to eligible people, including those qualifying for the [Lifeline program](#). The FCC recently released an FAQ [here](#). People will be able to start applying for benefits towards the end of this month, and benefits can be combined with other state and local programs.
- [Oregon Lifeline](#) program provides free or reduced phone and broadband services and devices and increased subsidies and offered some plans with unlimited minutes during the pandemic.

- December 2020's Coronavirus Relief legislation included \$7 billion for broadband, with specifically \$250 million dollars in telehealth funding, which will resurrect the [COVID-19 Telehealth Program](#).
- OCHIN's consortium (OR, WA, ID) was recently awarded \$5.8 million through the FCC's [Connected Care Pilot Program](#) to provide RPM and telehealth services to an estimated 3,450 low-income patients to treat high-risk pregnancy, maternal health conditions, mental health conditions and chronic and long-term conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.

Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) Option

CCOs also have opportunities to use Health Related Services (HRS) to improve care delivery and overall member and community health and well-being. The cost of telephone equipment and telephone or internet service plans necessary for members to receive services via telehealth/telemedicine are considered HRS. Providers are encouraged to contact CCOs to request HRS funding for phone services when necessary. More information about HRS is available on OHA's Health-Related Services page.

Response from Oregon Department of Education (ODE)

Thank you for your inquiry regarding broadband, connectivity, and infrastructure across the state. Below is a summary of some of the current and past initiatives to address the above issues as it pertains to student internet access for remote learning, which of course has close connection and implications for telehealth:

1. Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL) Program Grants in November 2020 - \$28 million
Recommendations to Governor Kate Brown from the May 25, 2020 Connecting Oregon Schools Summit resulted in the Governor allocating \$23.3 Million that went to school districts across the state to use to address the needs and expenses for implementing a successful Comprehensive Distance Learning Program.
[CDL Grant](#) funding activities allowed:
 - Access and Connectivity: Adequate infrastructure and/or services that enable internet access and connectivity for student learning.
 - Student and Teacher Devices: Appropriate and user friendly devices for students and educators to navigate through distance learning curriculums and programs of study.
 - Digital Content and Curriculum: High quality, adaptable, culturally responsive, and effective digital learning curriculums and content that fosters student learning and engagement.
 - Learning Management Systems: Online technology that allows educators to successfully deliver their teaching content and lessons.
 - Professional Learning for Educators: Various supports and training that ensure effective use of all digital learning tools.

To ensure that Grant Funds targeted areas of the state that face the most significant challenge, ODE developed a funding formula that is weighted around four primary drivers. These include:

- Number of students represented by Average Daily Membership (ADMr).
- Percentage of students living in poverty.
- Percentage of English language learners.
- Multiplier for districts that receive the small elementary school and small high school correction in the State School Fund formula.

Each grantee provided an application with a preliminary estimate of how the funds would be used, however we do not have specific numbers of devices, payments, or professional development from the applications.

2. Governor's Budget - \$118 million of proposed infrastructure investment - \$17.7 million for Connecting Oregon Schools Fund (See Attached)
 - o The Connecting Oregon Schools fund was created in 2018 under HB2043. When funds are available, districts can use them as a state match for federal eRate construction projects thereby reducing the cost to the districts and leveraging federal funds rather than local funds to complete construction. Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund – January 2021 – Governor approving \$10.3 million for ODE to match/support district infrastructure (See Attached)
3. Established Coordinating Group with Private Sector on Solutions - Partnership with Dell on devices; Partnership with Verizon on hotspots
 - o AT&T and Verizon provided discounted pricing options for districts on the cost of hotspots and monthly fees.
 - o Dell worked with the ODE to make up to 10,000 devices (Chromebook or laptops) available to districts when the supply chain challenges were making access to devices extremely difficult. They have come back to us this spring with another discounted offer for districts wishing to make purchases for the next school year. There is no limit to the number of devices that would be available.
 - o The Digital Learning Coalition was formed as a part of the work that was done to set up the May 25th Connecting Oregon Students for Learning Summit. This group consists of representatives from the Oregon Business Council, Oregon Community Foundation, Oregon Broadband Office, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, Oregon Association of Education Service Districts, and ODE meets monthly to discuss how the collaborative might continue to work on solutions for the challenges our schools are facing as a result of the pandemic.
4. \$1.6 billion of new federal stimulus funding in which school districts may access for a variety of needs created by COVID – including connectivity.

This list is of course not exhaustive of all the connectivity initiatives across the state but are those in which ODE has been most involved and most closely related to student and school connectivity. Please do reach out if you have any additional questions.

System of Care Advisory Council

For Systems of Care specifically there are several regional SOCs that have chosen to make access to technology the focal point for their SOC Regional grant applications. In 2021 circa \$96k is providing phones, data plans, hot spots and other technology for SOC families and youth in Klamath, Lane, Marion and Polk. The SOC Advisory and state agencies will be interested to see the data and lessons learnt from these projects.

As all these improvements roll forwards, please let this committee know if these issues do not resolve over the next 18 – 24 months in your region.