

TTS IMPACT

Accelerating telehealth awareness and adoption during COVID-19 pandemic

HRSA (HHS) partnered with Presidential Innovation Fellows (PIF)—a program within GSA's Federal Acquisition Strategy's Technology Transformation Services—to lead a cross-agency initiative to address challenges seen in adopting telehealth and serve 1M+ health care providers and 300M+ patients across the U.S.



HRSA'S STORY The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is the primary federal agency for improving health care to people who are geographically isolated, economically or medically vulnerable. Tens of millions of Americans receive quality, affordable health care and other services through HRSA's 90-plus programs and more than 3,000 grantees.



THE CHALLENGE

The public shouldn't have to choose between social distancing and receiving medical care. How can we increase telehealth awareness and adoption during a public health emergency?

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, digital health became increasingly important. When people seek in-person medical care, they risk exposure for themselves, their family, other patients, and health care providers. As a result, brick-and-mortar medical facilities are also offering telemedicine to add to or replace traditional in-person office visits. Using telemedicine from their home, clinicians are able to do virtual visits, refill and adjust essential medications, and modify treatments that will preserve and improve conditions that put patients at risk if left untreated.

Responding to this challenge, the [U.S. government made historic strides by deregulating telehealth](#) and reducing bottlenecks in key areas such as HIPAA requirements, reimbursement arrangements, and provider liability.

However, policy changes information and the impact on the public was not centralized nor communicated in plain language. This thwarted fast adoption of telehealth for both providers and the public.



THE SOLUTION

Early user research revealed that the health care providers and patients needed a central government resource that provided up-to-date guidance on how to use the latest tools and information. Providers with fewer administrative resources such as small-practice physicians found it particularly important.

To expand telehealth capacity to meet the demand for safe virtual care, we launched [Telehealth.HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov/telehealth). It provides plain language information about telemedicine and links to tools and resources for healthcare providers, making important information and resources easier to understand and broadly accessible for the public.



HOW WE DID IT

TTS embedded one [Presidential Innovation Fellow](#) (PIF) to Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to lead this cross-agency initiative. They drove product strategy and engineering development and managed a lean team of developers, designers, and user researchers. In order to create a beautiful and modern website, they leveraged the [U.S. Web Design System \(USWDS\)](#) to easily adopt the latest web design standards.

Another fellow led partnership strategy and coordinated with HHS as one of the telehealth policy leads at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).

PIF brought together leaders and subject-matter experts from HHS, HRSA, OSTP, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), and ASPR (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response) to plan the project, articulate user needs, secure sponsorship, set a timeline, and **launch the site in less than two weeks.**

Our fellows worked with OSG (Office of the Surgeon General) and OSTP to create a [call to service for physicians](#) to coincide with the site launch. The call ensured doctors could get the Surgeon General's message on social media and the HHS blog, go to the site, and get resources to set up their practices for telemedicine. They could also sign up quickly with telehealth platforms to expand the supply of telehealth providers.



THE RESPONSE

Here's the response we've received from agency leaders we supported.

"The Presidential Innovation Fellows were essential to [telehealth.hhs.gov](#). Likhitha's leadership delivered a comprehensive telehealth website where for the first time, patients and providers could get the information they needed to access and provide care. Dennis was instrumental in ensuring our private sector partners were taking the right steps to provide virtual care across the country. The PIFs stepped up and in to drive innovation with HHS at a crucial time and it is a model of how successful collaboration across government should occur." — **William Brady, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary and Senior Advisor to the Secretary at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

"In addition to the \$46.5 million in telehealth investments in FY20 that HRSA invested across its programs, HRSA led the effort to launch [telehealth.hhs.gov](#). This new website will continue to be a critical resource for clinicians and patients to successfully receive safe and reliable health care during the pandemic." — **Thomas J. Engels, Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

"Presidential Innovation Fellows have played critical roles in the government's response to multiple crises since the program's inception. Because of this, we have become a trusted partner to government leaders both in agencies and the White House. When the White House reached out to see if Fellows could provide product leadership and health policy expertise as they worked to launch this effort, we were thrilled to help. I'm extremely proud that this effort serves as another great example of PIFs stepping up during a crisis to help the American public." — **Joshua Di Frances, Executive Director, Presidential Innovation Fellows**

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THE IMPACT

Starting April 22, 2020, the website actively serves thousands of users by providing easy access to policy changes in plain language. The telehealth community's response has been positive. The core team remains committed to mobilizing a strong telehealth workforce to help keep Americans healthy through and beyond this challenging time.

Specifically, they established a long-term home and funding in HRSA's Federal Office of Rural Health Policy and Office for the Advancement of Telehealth. Building on this work further, PIF advised and supported the [White House launch of the Pledge to Embrace Technology to Advance America's Health](#). Over 50 of the nation's largest health insurance plans and stakeholders enthusiastically committed to expand telehealth coverage and adoption.

This move helped reassure Americans that telehealth is here to stay. **When patients can get healthcare through telehealth—and doctors can provide it—we protect ourselves and our communities. Our digital approach helps keep providers and patients safe and healthy for the long run.**

WORK WITH US | Contact Rebecca McBride at tts-info@gsa.gov

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