

# **Acceleration Access + Adoption** THE EVOLUTION OF TELEHEALTH AND BROADBAND





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# vision

To increase access to quality health care for rural and underserved South Carolinians through technology, broadband and telehealth.



# mission

To assist providers in keeping health care local and connecting rural and underserved South Carolinians to quality services through technology, broadband and telehealth.

## technology

Supporting the effective and efficient use of innovations in technology

## broadband

Improving coverage, affordability and quality of broadband service

#### **ftelehealth**

Advancing the adoption of telehealth for increasing access to quality care





**Graham Adams, PhD Chairman** Chief Executive Officer SC Office of Rural Health

**Rick Foster, MD Vice Chairman** Physician Advisor SC Department of Health and Human Services Help Me Grow SC



Will Harms, MD, MBA Vice President Medical Affairs BlueCross and BlueShield of SC



**Ann Lewis, MHA** Chief Executive Officer CareSouth Carolina



**John H. Magill** Retired State Director SC Department of Mental Health

irector



Danette McAlhaney, MD Family Practitioner, Owner Bamberg Family Practice



#### James McElligott, MD, MSCR Secretary

Executive Medical Director Center for Telehealth Medical University of South Carolina Co-Chair, South Carolina Telehealth Alliance



Medical University of South Carolina Co-Chair, South Carolina Telehealth Alliance Meera Narasimhan, MD, DFAPA Treasurer Professor and Chair, Department of Neuropsychiatry

and Behavioral Science, Senior Medical Director Behavioral Health Prisma Health (Midlands) and Special Advisor to UofSC President Health Care Innovations and Economic Development University of South Carolina



*letter from* **chief executive officer** 

PCC was founded in 2010 for the purpose of increasing access to health care services through the use of telehealth in rural and underserved communities in South Carolina. We quickly realized that we could not expand telehealth without expanding access to broadband. Broadband isn't just necessary for telehealth adoption but it has become known as the super-social determinant of health as it has a direct impact on all of the other social determinants of health. The pandemic has forced us to acknowledge that very simply stated...access to affordable internet service will forever be tied to the quality of life a person lives.

The worldwide pandemic has taught us all many valuable lessons. One important lesson for the PCC team is that even with the presence of COVID 19, there are always emerging opportunities on the horizon for technological innovations. The pandemic served as the catalyst that opened our eyes to evident digital and health inequities not only in South Carolina but across the globe. The rural and underserved communities that we serve experienced many of these inequities first-hand. This allowed us the opportunity to develop and implement a Digital Inclusion Program called Palmetto Connect. Our first efforts allowed our team to teach digital literacy skills to include how to conduct a telehealth visit to senior citizens in five rural and/or underserved communities in the state and to provide them with a digital device and free internet services. I can honestly say that this opportunity to impact the lives of some of our most beloved citizens has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my twenty-five-year career in rural health. This is the only the beginning of this chapter as we plan to expand this program to every community in South Carolina.

In 2021, as PCC continued to focus on acceleration, access and adoption of telehealth, technology and broadband, we realized that we had finally reached a major milestone – we now have a presence in all 46 counties in South Carolina as is evident in this Annual Report. This accomplishment was made possible through the many relationships we have established with our partners and collaborators not only in South Carolina but nationally. In 2021, we also gratefully accepted the Outstanding Network of the Year Award from the National Cooperative of Health Networks. This recognition was made possible through the dedication and hard work of each member of the PCC team as well as each member of our Board of Directors. What an honor to be recognized for doing what we love and feel so passionate about.

It is my pleasure to present this 2021 Annual Report as it represents more success that we could have ever imagined when we started PCC over a decade ago. It represents hard work, dedication, commitment, relationships, partnerships, collaborations and a deep love and passion for rural and the wonderful work we are blessed to engage in every day. Enjoy!

Lathy Schwarting

Kathy Schwarting, MHA Chief Executive Officer Palmetto Care Connections

# leadershipro e

# Kathy Schwarting SC Community Star Award

"Success has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It's what you do for others." These words from the late actor Danny Thomas apply perfectly to Kathy Schwarting, CEO of Palmetto Care Connections (PCC), a 501(c)[3] she founded in 2010. The long list of her accomplishments, big heart, innovative ideas, and what her nominator describes as "tireless energy and advocacy" are a few reasons she is a bright star!

Raised in a community of about 700 people with no healthcare provider in sight and the closest emergency room 30 minutes away, Kathy knew that she wanted to help rural communities gain better access to healthcare services in her beloved home state.

Her health career started in 1995 during her Master of Health Administration residency at a South Carolina rural hospital. For the next 16 years, Kathy worked in management positions between two rural hopitals in contiguous counties and created the first rural health network in the state, laying the foundation for promoting shared services between four rural hospitals. With Kathy in charge, the network grew to the point of sustainabilityuntil two of the participating hospitals closed. Kathy understood that this turn of events had far-reaching consequences. So rather than be driven away, she changed lanes, immersed herself in learning, aligned with others, and accelerated telehealth in rural South Carolina.

PCC is growing and thriving under Kathy's leadership. As South Carolina's broadband consortium leader, PCC helped save members over \$25 million through the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Healthcare Connect Fund program since 2013. Additionally, PCC recently received a \$17 million commitment from the FCC for broadband funding to benefit not-for-profit hospitals and health clinics, FQHCS, skilled nuring facilities, and other consortium members.

In 2020, Kathy assisted the state's Department of Education in identifying households that needed government-issued hotspots to participate in vitural learning and provided telehealth technical assistance to 38 schools in seven counties.

With all Kathy has done in her career to serve others, you'd think she'd be ready to slow down. But, she's not because she resolves to "continue working across South Carolina to assist rural communities in obtaining better healthcare services."

\*Reprinted from the 2021 Community Stars publication of the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health. PowerofRural.org Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina Leadership Team

Carolinas Preparedness Task Force

Center for Telehealth and eHealth Law (CTeL) Advisory Board

Co-Chair, South Carolina Telehealth Alliance

National Cooperative of Health Networks Association Member

Secretary, Lowcountry AHEC Board of Directors

Vice Chair, South Carolina Health Information Exchange (SCHIEx)

SC Behavioral Health Coalition Core Leadership Team Policy and Advocacy Committee "Early on, Palmetto Care Connections recognized the intersection between broadband access and health care access. Our rural communities need both to thrive, and Palmetto Care Connections has led the way in making sure our state works towards greater equity in those areas."

#### Graham Adams, PhD Chairman Chief Executive Officer SC Office of Rural Health



# Outstanding Health Network of the Year

PCC was awarded the National Cooperative of Health Networks Association's (NCHN) 2021 Outstanding Health Network Award.

The NCHN Outstanding Health Network of the Year Award recognizes any network or entire network organization that has improved access to health services in its service area and coordination of resources for network members through innovative, comprehensive approaches.

"Palmetto Care Connections was established in 2010 to improve access to care in rural and underserved communities by infusing health care services through telehealth technologies. This was important because of increasing difficulties in recruiting providers of rural areas and the financial challenges facing many small hospitals. Over the years, Palmetto Care Connections has grown into a statewide telehealth network and the resulting scope of activities has continued to expand. The leader of the South Carolina broadband consortium, Palmetto Care Connections assists health care providers in receiving broadband savings through the Federal Communication Commission's Healthcare Connect Fund program. Since 2013, they have helped providers save more than \$25 million in broadband costs. The network received a \$17 million FCC commitment to fund broadband for its consortium members over the next three years. These funds represent actual savings for health care providers," said Linda Weiss, NCHN Executive Director.

"What an honor it is for PCC to be named the Outstanding Health Network of the Year, especially considering all the amazing networks across the country who are as equally passionate about their work as we are. I am proud to say this accomplishment was made possible because of our PCC team of professionals who are hardworking, dedicated and compassionate about the work we do. We, as a team, are very lucky that we get to do what we love for our beloved communities in this crazy, fast-paced life on a daily basis. We are fortunate to also be part of another great network – NCHN! Thanks for your confidence in PCC."

> Kathy Schwarting, MHA Chief Executive Officer Palmetto Care Connections



# acceleration access

Oconee

Greenville

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Abbeville

Pickens

Anderson

Spartanburg

Laurens

Greenwood

Edgefield

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McCormick

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Saludo

While the terms quarantine and isolation have been in the spotlight for more than two years, Palmetto Care Connections and partners have been discussing digital equity and inclusion to improve access that is needed for telehealth, virtual learning, remote working and more. In 2021, PCC's role in accelerating the adoption of telehealth technologies and digital inclusion reached all **46 counties in South Carolina**, 27 states and 3 countries.

Alabama Arizona Arkansas California Colorado Connecticut Florida Georgia Illinois Indiana Maryland Massachusetts Michigan Minnesota

Nebraska New Hampshire New Jersey New York North Carolina Ohio Pennsylvania Tennessee Texas Utah Virginia Wisconsin Puerto Rico

Missouri

EDUCATION

78883

Summit &

Webinars



Ukraine Sweden Bangladesh

# & adoption



# sc broadband consortium

As the leader of the South Carolina Broadband Consortium, PCC helps health care providers receive broadband savings through the FCC's Healthcare Connect Fund Program by assisting them with the internet service provider bidding process and filing the appropriate information, invoices and supporting documentation to the Universal Service Administration Company (USAC).

# **Eligible Organizations:**

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**Behavioral Health Centers** 

Non Profit Hospitals

Federally Qualified Health Centers

**Rural Health Centers** 

**Skilled Nursing Facilities** 

**Free Clinics** 

**Correctional Facilities** 

**Teaching Hospitals** 



# 53000 Sin broadband savings since 2013



"Solvent Networks, a division of SCHA, has entered into new partnerships with Palmetto Care Connections. Through these partnerships, we've been able to meet member and community needs for broadband access and savings. PCC continues to be a strong, effective, knowledgeable, and collaborative partner."

#### Lara Hewitt

Vice President Workforce & Partner Engagement Solvent Networks **603** total#offundedsites

newcircuitsfundedin2021



# digital inclusion

#### Palmetto Care Connections' Palmetto Connect Digital Inclusion

**Solutions** help close the digital divide for residents in rural and underserved areas of South Carolina by increasing internet access and affordability, and connecting individuals to quality of life resources which can combat social isolation, enhance knowledge and improve health. Palmetto Connect Digital Inclusion Solutions initiatives:

#### **Digital Inclusion for Seniors**

provides hands-on digital training, free computing devices and free or discounted cellular or internet services. Senior citizens learn skills such as how to send and receive photos and emails, search the



internet for information, connect with family and friends using a virtual face to face app, play games and connect with their doctor for virtual telehealth appointments. PCC provides ongoing technical support for the seniors who complete the program.

Similarly, the **Community Development Digital Inclusion** curriculums provide hands-on digital training to assist rural residents in developing digital life skills such as assisting school-aged loved ones with virtual education or searching and applying for jobs. Each tailored curriculum includes training about how to safely navigate the internet, emails and video conferencing, including zoom and telehealth.

Palmetto Connect's **Digital Refurbishment** initiative plans to utilize high school and technical college students to upgrade and refurbish used digital devices that can be redistributed to residents of rural and underserved communities who can benefit from the refurbished devices.

#### \$450K CDC Health Equity Grant to Expand Telehealth and Improve Digital Literacy



PCC, working with the SC Office of Rural Health, has received a \$450,000 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Health Equity Grant to improve digital inclusion and support workplace health.

Through the program, at least 1,000 residents in at least seven rural counties will receive digital inclusion training, free digital devices, and 12 months of free cellular services.

PCC will collaborate with rural libraries, schools, Offices on Aging and other local partners to increase access to health care. A portion of the funding will help establish on-site telehealth services in rural small businesses and industries. The goals of the program are to increase access to health care, reduce absenteeism, save health insurance costs and improve overall health by implementing tailored telehealth programs based on employee needs.

Spectrum Awards \$35K Digital Education Grant to PCC



Palmetto Care Connections received a \$35,000 Spectrum Digital Education grant for Palmetto Connect as part of Spectrum's five-year, \$7 million commitment to digital education in Spectrum communities across the country. PCC will train seniors in 5 rural counties. "We applaud Palmetto Care Connections for their broadband education initiatives and for helping us support efforts that promote digital literacy in rural South Carolina counties," said Rahman Khan, Vice President of Community Impact for Charter Communications, Inc., which operates the Spectrum brand of broadband connectivity products. "Through this partnership with Palmetto Care Connections, the Spectrum Digital Education program is able to bring essential resources to those in need, and we look forward to working with them on this transformative project."

Left to right: Spectrum Senior Director of Government Affairs, Ben Braezeale; Bamberg County Councilwoman Sharon Hammond; Bamberg County Council Chairman Larry Haynes; Palmetto Care Connections (PCC) CEO Kathy Schwarting; PCC Chief of Technology Matt Hiatt; PCC Director of Digital Literacy Programs Diane Washington; Bamberg Mayor Nancy Foster; Olar Town Administrator Bert O'Rear.





#### PCC Partners with Rural LISC, SC Arts Commission and SC Department on Aging

Palmetto Care Connections received a \$19,500 Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) grant and an additional \$25,000 from the SC Department on Aging to implement a digital inclusion program for seniors in rural areas or underserved communities in Allendale, Barnwell, Clarendon, Richland and Williamsburg counties.

The Rural LISC grant and SC Department on Aging funds helped 100 seniors who live in rural communities, aged 60 and older, with digital literacy training, a free digital device and free cellular services for 12 months. Participants learned skills like how to take and send photos, send and receive emails, safely navigate the internet, use video conferencing and connect with their health care providers for telehealth visits. Additionally, some participants received training about Community Arts resources available through the SC Arts Commission such as art, quilting, poetry and other creative activities.







"This class is awesome! I have learned how to email, take photos, search the internet and I'm in the process of learning how to get telehealth appointments with my doctor on this tablet–I'm looking forward to that."

> Hattie Blackwell Clarendon County Participant

# digital inclusion





allendale county





barnwell county

"I enjoyed the class, liked the people, and could follow instructions they gave. I learned about sending and receiving emails, which is something I didn't know. It makes me feel real good. When I was growing up, I didn't have any of this. Before this class, I didn't know how to turn a computer on! I plan to do my banking online, play solitaire and keep in touch with my kids."

> Leslie Dowling Barnwell County Participant



clarendon county





richland county

williamsburg county

# sc virtual access

Through a three-year, \$300,000 per year, Federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Health Network Development grant, the South Carolina Virtual Access Telehealth Network (SC VATN) is developing telehealth access sites and expanding telehealth services in rural areas.

#### TELEHEALTH PATIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS FOR 2021:





An area of focus for the SC VATN in Year 1 has been chronic disease management targeting pharmacy patients who have diabetes or pre-diabetes, coordinated through Chronic Disease Self-Management Education and Medication Therapy Management activities provided through rural, independent pharmacy staff.



"Telehealth is easy to use for both the patient and me, and the sessions have gone very well. It is especially nice to see each other and interact in person on the telehealth computer screens, even though we're miles apart. I think it makes the patient feel more comfortable than just a telephone conversation."

> **Chelsea Hilliard, LMSW** Bamberg County Mental Health

# telehealth network

## **Community Engagement**



PCC staff members conducted blood pressure screenings and promoted telehealth at the 2021 Ehrhardt Pharmacy Holiday Open House. Pictured (L to R) Owner and Pharmacist Donna Avant and Jimmy Clayton with PCC Staff Kathy Rhoad and Breanna Parham.

PCC offers telehealth support services such as equipment installation and trainings. Telehealth equipment was installed at Lane Town Hall in Williamsburg County. PCC Telehealth Coordinator Breanna Parham conducted telehealth training for Lane Town Hall staff members as part of the telehealth equipment installation.



# collaboration and

#### Palmetto Care Connections Awarded



PCC serves as a leading partner and administrator for the South Carolina Rural Telehealth Initiative, a consortium of diverse health care providers that will deploy a telehealth platform and remote patient monitoring devices to enhance remote care of patients with COVID-19, remote care for select chronic disease patients with high risk of mortality from acquiring COVID-19 and telehealth capabilities for COVID-19 and other admitted patients to critical access hospitals

#### **Partners:**

Allendale County Hospital Alpha Behavioral Health Center, Chesterfield County Clemson Health Clinic, Walhalla Clyburn Center for Primary Care of Rural Health Services, Inc., Aiken Little River Medical Center Lowry's Primary Care, Chester Williamsburg Regional Hospital

The SC Rural Telehealth Initiative will be co-led by PCC CEO Kathy Schwarting, MHA and Clemson Rural Health Director Ron Gimbel, PhD.

"Remote patient monitoring often requires medical devices to capture biomedical readings. The devices, such as weight scale, blood pressure monitor, glucose monitor, pulse oximeter will be integrated within our telehealth platform and provide trended data for comparison. The devices will make it possible for some vulnerable/high-risk patients to isolate at home and receive care remotely," said Gimbel. "Within our critical access hospitals, the devices will be used within the hospital facilities to ensure high quality care despite of nursing shortages and other challenges."





# partnerships



# **Support Strategies:**

The South Carolina Telehealth Alliance (SCTA) is a statewide collaboration of many organizations joining forces to expand telehealth services across the state. The SCTA Advisory Council is co-chaired by James McElligott, MD, MSCR, of the Medical University of South Carolina and Kathy Schwarting, MHA, of Palmetto Care Connections.

# **Service Extension**

**Objective:** All citizens of South Carolina will have equitable access to ambulatory care.

Telehealth modalities will be used in the ambulatory setting to extend the reach of services that would otherwise be limited by travel and related barriers to care.



# **Convenient Care**

**Objective:** All citizens in South Carolina will have affordable and immediately available patient-initiated virtual urgent and other health system-entry level care from an in-state provider. *Convenient Care* services are designed to engage individual patients through their own available devices in order to optimize utilization and maximize healthcare engagement.

# **Healthy Equity**

**Objective:** Objective: Targeted, novel initiatives will close the gap in access to health care services for high-priority health disparities. *Health Equity* services will progress towards achieving health equity across the state in specifically identified areas of health disparity.

\*Information from SC Telehealth Alliance at SCTelehealth.org.

**Support Hospitals** 

**Objective:** Every community hospital in our state will have access to telehealth partnerships that enhance its services and its finances.

These *Hospital Services* represent partnerships that extend care between hospitals using telehealth with a focus of connecting resources from larger urban hospitals to community hospitals throughout the state.

**Support Primary Care** 

**Objective:** All primary care clinics in the state, with emphasis on Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), will have access to integrated services through telehealth partnerships. These services are intended to support the mission of the primary care clinic as a medical home, emphasizing the importance of local health care infrastructure while mitigating gaps in access to supporting resources.

"Palmetto Care Connections has and continues to be a core partner for the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance. Tirelessly assisting rural sites with access to telehealth services has been steadfast of PCC, and now they have accepted the challenge of improving digital literacy and enabling patients to connect to care directly from their homes. PCC continues to be an essential component of the Alliance while representing the rural needs of our state."

#### James McElligott, MD, MSCR

Executive Medical Director, Center for Telehealth Medical University of South Carolina Co-Chair, South Carolina Telehealth Alliance

# **9th annual telehealth**

Palmetto Care Connections hosted its Virtual 9th Annual Telehealth Summit of SC on November 9-10, 2021. Traditionally an in-person event, the Annual Summit unites health care leaders across the state of South Carolina. The virtual platform allowed PCC to share telehealth policy and program updates to participants beyond state borders.

sponsors Blue Cross Blue Shield of SC

**SC** Telehealth Alliance **Clemson Rural Health SC** Department of Mental Health SC Department of **Health and Human Services McLeod Health** MUSC **Prisma Health USC School of Medicine** 





# summit of south carolina

# telehealth awards winners



National Telehealth Champion United States Senator Tim Scott



State Telehealth Champions Cady Williams, MD and Kent Jones, MD (Ferlauto Center for Complex Pediatric Care) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)



Telehealth Program of Excellence Southeast Viral Interactive Case Conference Divya Ahuja, MD (UofSC SOM) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)



Telehealth Program of Excellence Project ECHO Opioid Use Disorder Rachel Grater and Karen Hartwell, MD (MUSC) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)



Telehealth Innovator The Navigation Center Marie Roland and John Govan



Telehealth Pioneer Michael Lyons, MD (Greenwood Genetic Center) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)



Scientific Poster Award The Financial Performance of Rural Hospitals Jada Johnson, Dunc Williams, and Mary Dooley (MUSC) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)



Programmatic Poster Award Telehealth Technologies, Data, and Process Improvement to Drive Innovation Evelyn Terrell, Jason Stiles, Saima Aftab, Elizabeth Sotolongo, Laura Cerpa and Fahd Lahrech



People's Choice Poster Award Microsoft Teams for Clinical Telehealth Collaborations Rachel Grater, Laura Langston, Ryan Lau, and Peter Gardella (MUSC) Pictured with Davia Smith (PCC)

# education, advocacy

In 2021, Palmetto Care Connections (PCC) shared technology, telehealth, and broadband updates across multiple platforms by connecting with partners around the state. PCC served as a voice for rural and underserved areas on a live television series, Palmetto Perspectives, produced by the South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV). PCC also made appearances on podcasts, webinars, conferences, roundtables, legislative meetings, radio, and more. The increased demand for virtual meetings and education has brought about a tremendous growth in PCC's social media audience, event attendees, and email and newsletter opens.

Since 2016, South Carolina has celebrated Telehealth Awareness Week (TAW) in the Fall led by SCTA. In 2021, Telehealth Awareness Week went national under the leadership of the American Telemedicine Association. PCC partnered with the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance to increase telehealth awareness among patients and health care providers. During TAW, PCC also partnered with the SC Department of Mental Health to highlight Telemental Health services in South Carolina in response to the national mental health crisis.



# & awareness 1.3 K social media audience Kinkedin

**1**36%

increase in -



tacebook

- increase in -



twitter **1748**%

increase in

# Live TV, Podcasts, Webinars, Conferences and More



Palmetto Perspectives Show produced by SCETV



#### **Telehealth Heroes Podcast** produced by DoxyMe



**Growing Rural Podcast** produced by the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare



A Discussion on Broadband sponsored by Charter Communications



**Broadband Roundtable Discussion** hosted by Spectrum and Northeastern Technical College



Georgia Partneship for Telehealth Conference



SC Primary Health Care Association State & Policy Forum

twitter clicks



**Sow, Harvest, Reap the Benefits** *hosted by Blue Cirrus Consulting*