



Navigating and Bridging the Digital Divide to Increase Access to Care

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INTRODUCTION

Rural communities face health care access challenges due to factors such as geographic isolation, limited transportation options, and a shortage of health care providers. For rural South Carolinians who are geographically isolated, without vehicles, and under-served, essential services—such as scheduling medical appointments, joining telehealth sessions, applying for benefits, or arranging alternative transportation—depend on two key capacities:

- Having the necessary technology (a smartphone and reliable internet).
- Possessing the digital literacy to navigate websites, use health portals, and communicate online.

As a result, the transportation challenge in rural South Carolina becomes a digital access and literacy crisis. Without the tools and skills to engage digitally, residents remain caught in a cycle of inequity, unable to use technology to overcome the mobility barriers that limit their access to care and resources.

CHALLENGES

- **No Vehicle:** Up to 15% of households in rural counties like Allendale, Bamberg, and Barnwell lack transportation.
- **Limited Transit:** Only 32% of rural counties have full public transit; nearly half have little or none.
- **Weak Internet:** Over 300,000 locations lacked reliable broadband in 2021.
- **Few Devices:** 1 in 4 low-income households lack computers, relying on phones for appointments.
- **Low Tech Skills:** Many older residents struggle with online systems, leading to missed or canceled telehealth sessions.

TRANSPORTATION

- In some rural counties, over 10% of the population does not have a vehicle
- Less than 1/3 of rural SC has full access to public transportation
- Miles traveled to care is significantly higher for rural residents

DIGITAL SKILLS

- Elderly citizens lack necessary digital needs
- Low-Income homes are less-likely to have a device

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

- Over 300,000 locations lack high speed internet connectivity (As of 2021)

Resources

• Connect South Carolina/Broadband Office – State initiative expanding broadband access in rural and underserved areas. <https://broadband.sc.gov>
• South Carolina Digital Equity Plan (DHEC & SCORH partners) – Programs addressing digital literacy, device access, and affordability. <https://broadband.sc.gov/digital-equity>
• Libraries Connecting Communities – Free Wi-Fi, device lending, and digital skills training at local libraries. <https://statelibrary.sc.gov>
• NTIA Digital Equity Act Programs – Federal grants supporting local digital literacy projects. <https://www.ntia.gov>

• SCDOT Office of Public Transit – Directory of regional and rural public transit providers across South Carolina. <https://www.scdot.org/travel/transit.aspx>
• SC Department on Aging – I-CARE Program – Transportation coordination and assistance for older adults. <https://aging.sc.gov>
• United Way 211 South Carolina – Searchable database for local transportation services and volunteer driver programs. Dial 211 or visit <https://sc211.org>
• South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH) – Programs supporting rural transportation infrastructure and partnerships. <https://scorh.net>

PARTNERS AND GOALS

Throughout the program, we have partnered with many different organizations to train different groups of people.

GOALS

- **Combat Social Isolation**
- **Increase Healthcare Literacy**
- **Offer Connectivity**
- **Provide Devices**

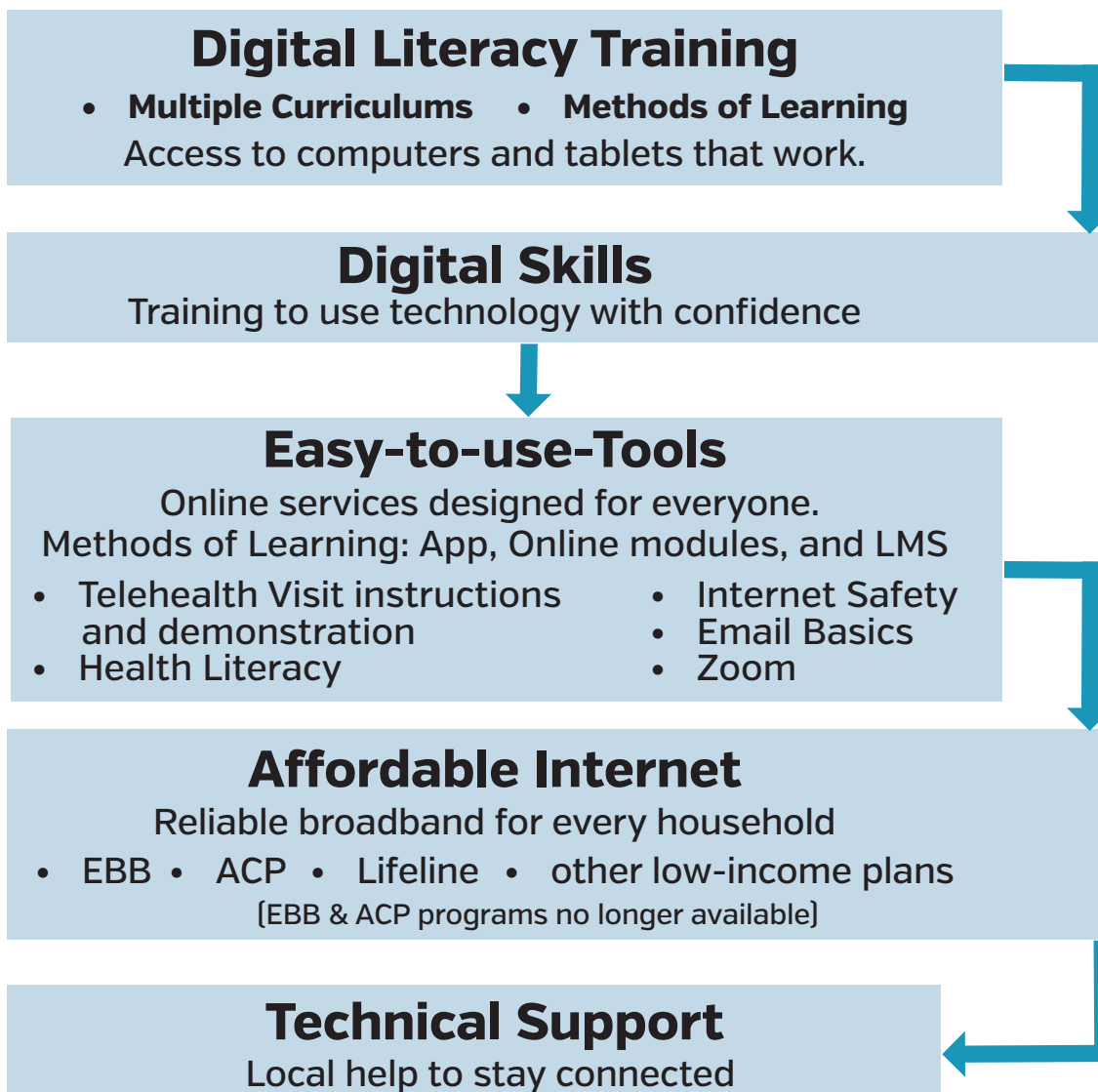
SUPPORTERS

- South Carolina Department on Aging
- South Carolina Office of Rural Health (Family Solutions) & ATC
- South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- South Carolina Telehealth Alliance
- Spectrum
- Comcast
- Rural LISC
- Medical University of South Carolina
- Center for Community Health Alignment

POPULATION

- Seniors
- New and Expecting Mothers
- Medicaid Recipients
- Referred Patients with digital need
- Community members where internet service is newly available

STRATEGIC AIMS :



METHODS/EVOLUTION

IN PERSON,
SYNCHRONOUS

- 4-6 hours
- Training location in their county
- Participant gets to take device home at the end of training to use freely

IN PERSON & ONLINE
ASYNCHRONOUS,
SYNCHRONOUS

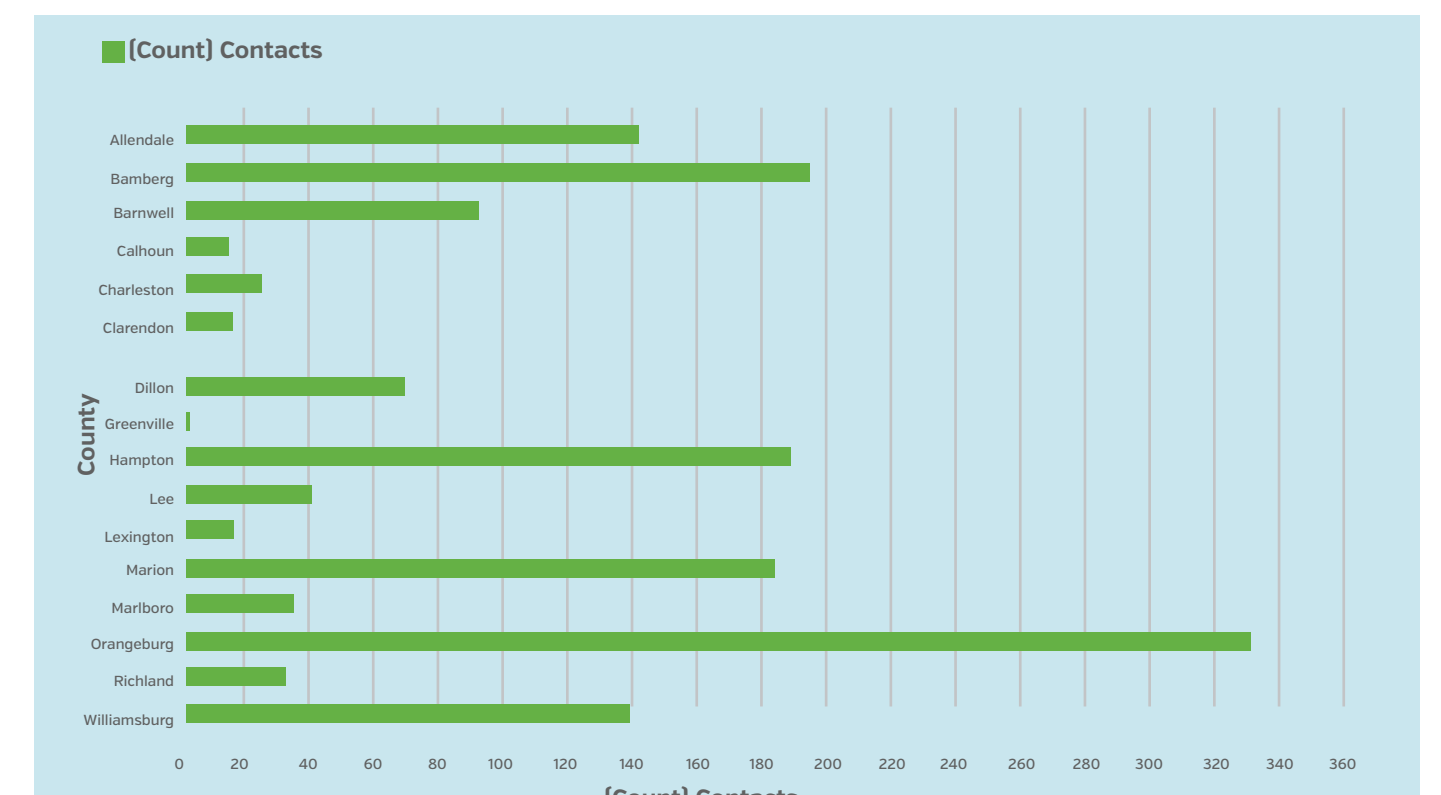
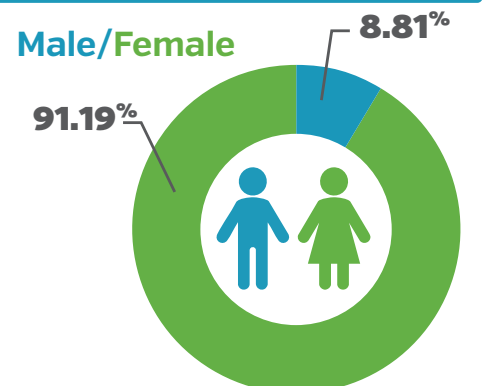
- Pickup location in county
- If they would like assistance/training, PCC staff will assist at that time
- If not, device is picked up and training is done on participants own time
- Train the trainer

ONLINE
ASYNCHRONOUS

- Device is mailed
- Participant is required to finish their training within 1 year of receiving
- ScaleFusion Device Management

OUTCOMES

2222 Received Devices and Telehealth Training
1449 Received 1-year of Internet Service
1564 Technical Support



TESTIMONIALS

"Thank you all so much for providing me with the opportunity to receive the tablet and the assessments. Since then, I have done a few telehealth visits with my primary doctor, spine specialist, and eye doctor. I have done several Zoom visits with my church. I'm so blessed for this opportunity, I have learn things that I never thought I could learn about, and now I'm doing it regularly."

Marilyn Dominick

"Taking this class, I have been able to learn things that I haven't learn before. After the class, I have been on the device every day, learning new ways to navigate it. I will be having my 1st telehealth visit on November 3rd with my specialist."

Gloria Legette



CONCLUSION

Whether using classroom style training, a learning management system (LMS), or our mobile app, this program ensures South Carolinians have the tools, skills, and connectivity needed to fully participate in healthcare, education, and everyday life.



Available on the App Store



Available on the Google Play