

Prove it: National telehealth research network greenlighted

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The University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus is part of a team of researchers that has received a grant of \$3.6 million for the SPROUT-CTSA Collaborative Telehealth Research Network.

This five-year grant will support the development of [telehealth](#) research efforts, metric development, identification of best practices and the development of collaborative policy and advocacy materials across the country. It builds on work underway as part of the SPROUT (Supporting Pediatric Research on Outcomes and Utilization of Telehealth) collaborative, an established network of institutions and pediatric providers operating within the American Academy of Pediatrics (which is a sub awardee of the grant).

The Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) is the primary awardee of the grant. Institutions that are part of this collaborative effort include the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus—Children's Hospital Colorado, University of Pennsylvania—Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and Mercy Clinic in St. Louis, Missouri.

"At the national level, there is no academic authority currently spearheading multicenter telehealth research studies," said Christina Olson, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics and site primary investigator at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus—Children's Hospital Colorado. "We have piecemeal efforts happening in terms of research, national policy development and payer guidelines. This

network will provide tools, resources and guidance to accelerate the development of telehealth studies across the country. We will support champions of telehealth to become champions of research as well."

"This is a huge step forward in the development of safe and impactful telehealth programs across the country," said primary investigator for the grant S. David McSwain, MD, MUSC Children's Health physician and MUSC associate professor of pediatric critical care and chief medical information officer. "Academic research into the real impact of telehealth services is a critical component of developing and growing programs with the greatest potential to improve our [health care system](#). Many physicians and other [health care providers](#) are hesitant about incorporating telehealth into their practices because it's difficult to separate the theoretical benefits from the real value."

In 2015, McSwain collaborated with a small group of pediatric physicians across the country to form SPROUT, which has since completed and published the nation's first broad assessment of pediatric telehealth infrastructure across the country.

"That was a critical starting point," said John Chuo, MD, associate professor of clinical pediatrics, co-chair of SPROUT and site primary investigator at CHOP. "When we started SPROUT, we realized that we couldn't conduct studies on pediatric telehealth unless we actually knew which institutions were providing which types of services, and that information wasn't available anywhere. So we made that our first investigation."

While much anecdotal or small-scale evidence exists about the benefits of telehealth, including cost reduction, improved quality of care in some patient populations and improved access to care for some rural and underserved populations, barriers to fully demonstrating the gains made via telehealth care delivery persist. For example, there are few best

practices in existence for conducting multisite telehealth research involving patient care outcomes, limited access to research trials for rural populations and limitations to care access for special populations such as children or the elderly.

The grant is funded by a Collaborative Innovation Award through the National Center for the Advancing Translational Science (NCATS), a branch of the National Institutes of Health. The program will operate in collaboration with CTSA (Clinical and Translational Science Award) sites across the country to facilitate research development and support current and future telehealth researchers to develop projects and apply for funding. CU's Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute (CCTSI) and its partner, Children's Hospital Colorado are one of these CTSA sites. As opposed to supporting a specific clinical research study, this grant seeks to establish an easily accessible support structure around telehealth research: tools, resources, guidance, collaboration, education and advocacy materials that will be valuable to anyone across the country who wants to study telehealth programs.

"We expect this network to become the preeminent source for evidence-based policy and outcomes data," said Brooke Yeager McSwain, RRT, health policy consultant for the project and manager of the South Carolina Children's Telehealth Collaborative. "Our national and state legislators have seen the benefits of telehealth for certain populations and regions. We have to demonstrate to them that this works across the country and has the potential to dramatically impact health care delivery models, particularly in value-based care."

Alison Curfman, MD, medical director of Pediatrics at Mercy Virtual and a co-investigator of the grant, spends much of her time thinking about better ways to partner with children and their families for overall better health. "We have to ensure that children have access to every type of care that they need at the right time, no matter where they live. The

technology is here. The commitment of the early-adopters is here. Our next frontier is proving to other pediatric providers across the health care spectrum that telehealth is about so much more than convenience."

Provided by CU Anschutz Medical Campus

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