



## **MANCHESTER COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGIES, INC.**

### **Comments Re: FCC Rural health Care Reform – WC Docket No. 02-60 In support of CTN comments on FCC’s Public Notice dated July 19, 2012**

Manchester Community Technologies, as co-coordinating agency of the Los Angeles County Regional Broadband Consortia strongly supports the California Telehealth Network (CTN) in its effort to increase Health Care Provider participation in unserved and underserved communities. The reason for such support stems from the realization that urban communities lack a sufficient number of hospitals, especially emergency and urgent care facilities, in Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles County residents, like in other large urban areas, are increasingly burdened by chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and stroke, diabetes, arthritis and chronic mental health problems. The treatment of chronic health problems comprises more than half of all expenditures for health care statewide, as well as nationally.

Although many Los Angeles communities struggle to overcome health disparities, people throughout Los Angeles County often face obstacles to obtaining needed health care services. Some of the disparities in neighborhoods result from differences among racial and ethnic groups, economic conditions and language barriers.

Los Angeles County has over 111 acute care hospitals, which equates to approximately 1.23 beds per 1,000 people. However, the distribution of these resources is not evenly distributed. In some parts of the county, particularly South Los Angeles, the rate drops to fewer than 0.7 beds per 1000 people.<sup>i</sup> Hospital closures are significant in Los Angeles, as the county has experienced the loss of 33 hospitals, thus eliminating over 5,200 acute care hospital beds. Moreover, a disproportionately high number of hospital closures and bed reductions occurred in areas which serve low-income and working-class communities.

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Thus, both rural and urban communities will greatly benefit from the expansion of Telehealth services by enabling Broadband Services Program site eligibility to include:

- Assisted living facilities
- Skilled nursing facilities
- Nursing homes
- Behavioral health providers
- Data Centers – which have become critical for hosting patient data in the form of Electronic Health Records
- Residential patient monitoring

We also encourage the FCC to not place additional restrictions on HCPs who are currently challenged to keep pace with urgent care demands, a shrinking workforce and an uncertain economic environment. We agree with CTN that further impediments may hinder adoption of Telehealth/ Telemedicine in all areas of our great state.

MCT mimics the California Telehealth Network’s highlighted points to include:

- Encouraging the FCC to transition the Pilot Program administrative resources to the development and establishment of the next rural health care Broadband Subsidy Program as quickly as possible.
- Strongly supports the continued inclusion of urban sites in consortia participating in the Broadband Services Program.
- Strongly recommends that the Commission establish subsidy levels for the Broadband Services Program (for non-recurring and recurring expenses) based on the current 85% Pilot Program levels; and

Finally, we support CTN in its opposition to changes to the current Pilot Program eligibility requirements for rural versus urban HCP’s and recommends the FCC use Health Provider Shortage Areas (HPSA) as a better measure of medically underserved areas.

In summary, the advancement of Telehealth across the nation will require that innovative ideas are given an opportunity to thrive and are afforded the requisite support and collaborative spirit necessary to excel. We fully encourage the FCC to

adopt, or highly consider those comments by CTN because of its significance to the delivery and quality of healthcare in Los Angeles County.

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<sup>i</sup> Task Force of Healthcare Options, Achieving the Vision: Healthcare Options for Los Angeles County, 2009; The California Endowment, Los Angeles.