



Building Healthy Communities

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March 26, 2014

Mr. Tom Wheeler  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Rural Healthcare Broadband Experiment of Interest

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

This letter provides an expression of interest from the Georgia Partnership for TeleHealth (GPT) to participate in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rural Broadband IP Experiment funding. As described below, we are seeking \$8 million over two years to conduct the Georgia Children's Health Improvement Network (GCHIN) network strategy, which has created a highly efficient care delivery model integrating public health, primary care, school-based telehealth clinics, and health information technology with world class pediatric physician specialties to provide access to care, realize efficiencies in the system and improve the overall health of the underserved children living in Georgia's counties of persistent poverty.

**The GCHIN's Legislative Charge: Achieve Efficiencies.** The GCHIN will focus on integrating individual systems of care to achieve efficiencies and improve the delivery of rural health care services to Georgia's poorest children to achieve these overarching goals:

- 1. To implement a common integrated health information platform over wireless and LAN based networks. Providers and patients will be equipped with wireless medical devices and other peripherals and software where patients will have access to a complete continuum of care, from the home to primary care, and all the way to specialist including education and training using wireless and LAN based technologies and networks*
- 2. To improve the quality and delivery of primary and specialty health care services through the GCHIN*
- 3. To improve medical oversight through the deployment of electronic health records and by leveraging the statewide HIE efforts*
- 4. To educate the workforce of the new integrated health care delivery model*
- 5. Develop a long term sustainability plan that will sustain the network*

## **Organizational Background**

The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth (GPT) is the leading agency in Georgia focusing on increasing access to health care through innovative use of technology including telemedicine, health information exchanges and telehealth. These services have allowed health care providers to provide services in the medically underserved areas in Georgia using technology, which saves cost for patients by reducing travel, and reducing hospital visits. Also physicians who adopt this technology are able to be more

effective and efficient in servicing their clients. We have found that telemedicine services have become mainstream healthcare services as we work to train patients, nurses, advanced practice nurse practitioners, physician assistance and physicians on integrating technology into their practice of medicine to produce better healthcare outcomes in more efficient ways to those who need it the most.

We are uniquely qualified to administer telehealth services in Georgia given our knowledge of the challenges and solutions that we have employed in regions throughout all of Georgia. Our over 350 locations, over 200 physicians representing 40 specialties with local and regional hospitals, community centers, Federally Qualified Health Centers, OB/GYN Practices, Home Health Agencies, Public Health, Department of Family and Children Services, Charitable Care Clinics, Community Mental Health, Child Advocacy Centers, Pharmacies, Schools, Nursing Homes, Correctional Facilities and physician groups will allow our collaborative efforts to design and implement an integrative system of care program that will make it easy for patients to get information needed to make decisions on the types of benefits they are eligible for that meet their specific healthcare needs. *GPT'S partnership with Archbold Medical Center who serves as a HUB for the statewide network and receives over \$800,000 per year in USAC funding has been key to the success of the Georgia program. Our partnership with the Bacon County Hospital FCC pilot project in expanding the telemedicine network in Southeast Georgia has increased the capacity to serve Georgia citizens in getting access to care.*

## **Population Target**

### **Why Plan a New Delivery Model to Improve Access to Specialty Care for Rural Children?**

The Georgia Children's Health Improvement Network (GCHIN) will address the declining health of the children living in 26 Georgia counties of persistent poverty by providing access to the unserved and underserved children in Public Health District 8-1 and 9-2 through outreach and education, and through collaboration with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, primary care physicians, schools and local stakeholders. Georgia Public Health District 8-1 consists of Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Tift and Turner Counties. Georgia Public Health District 9-2 consists of Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Brantley, Bulloch, Candler, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Evans, Jeff Davis, Pierce, Tattnall, Toombs, Ware and Wayne counties that are located in the most southern part of Georgia. These Health Districts were chosen for the GCHIN because all 26 of these counties were identified as counties of persistent poverty by the Carl Vincent Institute of Government in their recent study on persistent poverty in the south.



<http://www.poverty.uga.edu/docs/FacultyResearchGrantsProgram2008.pdf>

In addition to persistent poverty, the 2010 Health Profile developed by the Georgia Department of Public Health shows that when compared to the rest of the state and to the nation, overall the counties in District 8-1 and 9-2 have a higher percentage of poverty, have a higher rate of deaths by heart disease, have a significantly higher rate of infant mortality, have a higher

percentage of low birth weight babies, and have a higher rate of obesity and diabetes in children. <http://wic.ga.gov/pdfs/wic/data/2006WICMedicaidTotalBirths.pdf>

Health statistics from the counties within this Health District 8-1 and 9-2 consistently show that the Georgia children living in these counties are at higher risk of disease due to the high level of poverty and lack of access to adequate primary care, specialty care and healthcare education.

**Drilling down further into the specific disparities that are most prevalent in children's health in Georgia, the first need to be addressed is a growing problem and that is childhood obesity.**

### **Collaborative Partners**

The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth (GPT) 501(c)(3) has formed collaborative partnerships with Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), Georgia Health Information Exchange, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disorders, Division of Family and Children Services, Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (Children's), Tift Regional Medical Center, South Georgia Medical Center, Savannah Memorial, Columbus Regional, Regents University Medical Center, Coffee Regional Medical Center, the Coffee County Board of Education and Atkinson County Board of Education, Berrien County Board of Education, Chatham County Board of Education, Turner County Board of Education, Albany Board of Education, Atlanta Public Schools, West End Federally Qualified Health Center, Dalton County Board of Education and Liberty County Board of Education to develop a regionally integrated network titled "Georgia Children's Health Improvement Network" (GCHIN) to address the urgent healthcare needs of approximately 30,000 children battling the ill effects of asthma, obesity, behavioral health disorders and poor dental health in 26 of the poorest counties of Georgia.

### **Focus of Project**

The GCHIN will focus on continuing to establish a state of the art healthcare delivery system with a patient centered medical home model in the fore front of design. This program aims to be a national platform for transforming healthcare safely and securely. GPT has a long history in leveraging FCC Universal Service Funds to connect rural clinics, schools and providers to support the gaps in health care in Georgia. The goals mentioned in the opening statements will coalesce around the integration of care for children specifically suffering from Asthma, Diabetes and Obesity. The preventative nature of this program will also address the many health disparities and lack of access to basic primary and pediatric care necessary to offset the cause and effect of these chronic illnesses in the short and long term for children.

“Georgia ranks near the bottom in terms of the overall health of its citizens”, stated in a recent study by the University of Georgia identifying the counties in Georgia with persistent poor health for children linked to persistent poverty. Of Georgia’s 159 counties, 91 counties were found to have persistent poor children’s health. Given these health issues and the state of healthcare in the state of Georgia, it has been a tremendous challenge to reach these children. We believe an integrated health care network that integrates telemedicine applications, health information technology and world class children’s specialists into public health and community health will improve health outcomes through improved access to care and change lives.”

**Closing**

This letter serves as an initial presentation or our expression of interest. GPT and its partner organizations stand ready to develop a more detailed proposal and provide a business plan that demonstrates the path to sustainability. Should we be invited to do so by the FCC, GPT will promptly provide additional detail, answer questions and/or develop a full proposal.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula Guy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

**Paula Guy**

**CEO**

**Georgia Partnership for TeleHealth**