NIH Awards $23 Million to Study Telehealth for Cancer Care

Four academic institutions will establish centers of excellence to conduct research on telehealth for cancer-related health care.

August 22, 2022 By National Institutes of Health

The National Cancer Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, will award $23 million to four academic institutions to establish centers of excellence that will conduct research on the role of telehealth in delivering cancer-related health care, a practice that became more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The awards will establish NCI's Telehealth Research Centers of Excellence (TRACE) initiative, which is being supported by the Cancer Moonshot, a White House initiative first launched in 2016 and reignited by President Biden in 2022 to accelerate the rate of progress against cancer. The awards are to be distributed over five years, pending availability of funds.

"One of the Cancer Moonshot goals is to make the cancer experience less burdensome for patients and their families and caregivers," said Katrina Goddard, PhD, director of NCI's Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences (DCCPS). "We are awarding these centers of excellence to better understand how telehealth can contribute to improved health outcomes across the cancer care continuum."

Telehealth is health care provided by doctors and other providers from a distance using electronic means, such as by phone, email, text message, or video conference. During the pandemic, the use and availability of telehealth skyrocketed in primary and specialty care, including cancer care. However, little is understood about how best to use and sustain telehealth in providing cancer-related care.

"These centers will address important gaps in telehealth and cancer-related care delivery," said Robin C. Vanderpool, DrPH, chief of the Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch in DCCPS. "We need to establish an evidence base for using this technology to deliver health care in oncology and make it part of routine care. In addition, these centers will explore opportunities for scalability and dissemination of their cancer-related telehealth interventions beyond their own health systems."

The research being undertaken by the four centers will study the role of telehealth in fields from

prevention to screening, diagnosis to treatment, and survivorship. Each center will be led by an academic institution that has assembled diverse teams of researchers to conduct large trials in real-world clinical settings such as hospitals, cancer centers, oncology practices, and primary care offices.

These are the four funded centers:

- The Telehealth Research and Innovation for Veterans with Cancer (THRIVE) Telehealth Research Center: Led by NYU Grossman School of Medicine, New York City, this center will work with the Veterans Health Administration to examine how social factors such as race and ethnicity, poverty, and rural residence affect the delivery of telehealth for cancer care.
- The Scalable Telehealth Cancer Care (STELLAR) Center: Led by Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., this center will focus on using telehealth to extend health services to cancer survivors aimed at reducing risk behaviors such as smoking and physical inactivity.
- The University of Pennsylvania Telehealth Research Center of Excellence (Penn TRACE): Led by the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, this center will use communication science and behavioral economics to compare the effectiveness of multiple telehealth strategies on shared decision-making for lung cancer screening and to improve timely access to comprehensive molecular testing for advanced lung cancer.
- The Making Telehealth Delivery of Cancer Care at Home Effective and Safe (MATCHES) Telehealth Research Center: Led by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK), New York City, this center will study the effectiveness of a remote monitoring system called MSK@Home for patients receiving systemic treatments for prostate and breast cancer.

In addition to developing innovative ways to use telehealth in cancer care, the centers will focus on identifying and addressing telehealth-related disparities among vulnerable populations, including racial and ethnic groups, rural residents, older adults, people who are uninsured or low-income, people who are socially isolated, and people who have limited digital literacy. All four centers are also committed to training the next generation of telehealth-focused researchers.

“These centers will be at the cutting edge of some amazing breakthroughs by creating sustainable and effective telehealth options tailored specifically for cancer care,” said Roxanne E. Jensen, PhD, a program director in the Outcomes Research Branch in DCCPS who is overseeing the TRACE initiative with Dr. Vanderpool. “This work will pave the way for having health care delivery look a lot different for cancer patients over the next five to 10 years, and that’s really exciting and in alignment with the goals of the Cancer Moonshot initiative.”

This news release was published by the National Institutes of Health on August 18 , 2022.
