

Impacts of Broadband Expansion on the Health of Californians

SUMMARY:

\$2,000,000 to support Insure the Uninsured Project (ITUP), in conjunction with three partner organizations, to comprehensively gather and report back to the Legislature data on the impacts of expanded broadband access on health outcomes.

BACKGROUND:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant gaps in broadband access throughout California's communities. Digital equity, broadband infrastructure, and broadband access impact both urban and rural communities across the state. In an increasingly virtual world without adequate access to the internet, Californians are suffering. Healthcare districts play a vital role in the communities they serve and are experiencing a strain due to insufficient broadband services.

In FY 2021-22 California made the largest investment in history for middle (\$3.25 billion) and last mile (\$2.75 billion) broadband projects. Since the budget was enacted, the California Department of Technology released a map for the first 18 middle mile projects that will be funded through these investments. Along with these initial middle mile projects, there are opportunities for the health care system, including health plans, clinics, hospitals, and healthcare districts, to ensure that broadband expansion improves the lives and well-being of the communities they serve. Additionally, these strategic partnerships present a unique opportunity to collect, aggregate, and disseminate critical data to inform policy and broadband projects going forward.

THE PROPOSAL:

In three regions throughout the state (northern-rural, central valley suburban, southern-urban), ITUP will receive funding for the purpose of identifying metrics for evaluating the impact of expanded broadband and connectivity including, but not limited to, health outcomes by patient and payer type, behavioral health expansions, impacts to workforce, and emergency response. The data project will utilize ongoing and new broadband deployment efforts of partner organizations, particularly those in the health care industry.

The data collected through these strategic partnerships will be essential to understanding how and where broadband investments are the most impactful and how to appropriately leverage these projects to ensure better health outcomes. Additionally, these projects will serve as an opportunity to develop best practices as the state and other localities gear up to make significant investments in furthering middle mile and last mile infrastructure projects. The success of this project will result in rich data collection on digital equity barriers to health and health care in California and demonstrate, for the first time in California, beneficial health outcomes and health care cost savings as a result of meaningfully closing gaps in the digital divide.

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Association of California Healthcare Districts