
FCC, USDA, and HHS Join Forces to Improve Rural Telehealth

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On August 3, 2020, President Trump released an "Executive Order on Improving Rural Health and Telehealth Access" (the "EO"). The EO instructed the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS") and the Secretary of United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA"), in coordination with the Federal Communications Commission (the "FCC") and other departments and agencies, to "develop and implement a strategy to improve rural health by improving the physical and communications healthcare infrastructure available to rural Americans." This directive was predicated chiefly on the "unique challenges" facing the 57 million citizens living in rural communities, such as the closure of 129 rural hospitals over the past decade, "limited transportation opportunities, shortages of healthcare workers, and an inability to fully benefit from technological and care-delivery innovations." By leveraging telehealth modalities implemented during the COVID-19 public health emergency (the "PHE"), the EO is intended "to increase access to, improve the quality of, and improve the financial economics of rural healthcare."