

# MaineHealth

## MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community  
Health Network  
LincolnHealth  
MaineHealth Care At Home  
Maine Behavioral Healthcare  
Memorial Hospital  
Maine Medical Center  
NorDx  
Pen Bay Medical Center  
Southern Maine Health Care  
Synernet  
Waldo County General Hospital  
Western Maine Health

## Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable  
Care Organization

## MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health  
Mid Coast-Parkview Health  
New England Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Portland  
St. Mary's Health System

**Sarah Calder, MaineHealth**

## **Statement of Support for Broadband Expansion**

**Tuesday, March 23, 2021**

Senator Chipman, Representative Terry and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation:

As part of MaineHealth's mission of "Working Together So Maine's Communities are the Healthiest in America," I am writing in strong support of expanding access to high-speed Internet and broadband infrastructure because it will help increase access to healthcare for rural Mainers by removing broadband barriers that are limiting the use of telehealth.

Since the start of the Public Health Emergency, MaineHealth has conducted more than 200,000 video visits to patients' homes. Many of these visits were conducted successfully with both patient and provider hearing and seeing one another clearly. It is not uncommon, however, to have challenges with the audio or video quality due to poor internet speeds at the patient's home. Some of these visits have to revert to phone when the internet challenges are too significant to overcome. In some cases, the visit needs to be rescheduled entirely if audio is not adequate to support the needs of the visit. The impact of these challenges is widespread. The patient, who may be interrupting their work or caregiving schedule, is delayed from returning to their normal responsibilities. The provider is delayed in reaching the next patient who is then impacted similarly to the first patient. Moreover, telehealth is sometimes the only way to reach patients who would not have otherwise come into the clinic setting; this can be particularly true for behavioral health patients. When the telehealth experience is poor due to technology challenges, patients may opt to delay future care creating an even larger ripple effect.

The State's current broadband service laws prioritize broadband funding for unserved areas and designate a site as served if it has any internet access, even if it is not high speed, making that area ineligible for funding. Today's internet activities, including video-based meetings for school, telehealth visits, and virtual private network (vpn) to access work require significantly more bandwidth than traditional residential internet usage. Mainers with low-speed internet access are now finding their connectivity rate inadequate to support these new, though necessary, demands of daily life. To establish criteria for defining unserved that includes a requirement of broadband speeds of 100/100mbps acknowledges the need to provide high-speed broadband to all Mainers to ensure they don't experience a significant disruption to their lives.

Our providers and patients have reported great success from the expanded use of telehealth during the pandemic and we expect that telehealth will be used long after the Public Health Emergency ends, but Maine's lack of or limited

broadband internet service is preventing the technology from being used in the areas of the state that are most in need of increased access to healthcare. With that said, we urge the Legislature to support expanding access to high-speed Internet and broadband infrastructure.

Thank you,

Sarah Calder  
Director of Government Affairs  
MaineHealth