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March 10, 2023

Dear Legislator:

We are pleased to share with you the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) Telehealth Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF) Pilot Project – *Unanticipated Outcomes of a Telehealth Pilot Project in Skilled Nursing Facilities Care: Don't Put the Cart Before the Course*. It provides timely practice insights and vital Lessons Learned to inform State policy to optimize Telehealth to improve patient outcomes and overall population health.

The Pilot Project was funded by the CETF Board of Directors in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic, SNFs across the country were overwhelmed by COVID-19 and media reports highlighted the devastation to residents and staff continuously being exposed or infected at alarming rates leading to severe illness and death.

This Pilot Project studied and confirmed Telehealth efficacy in 5 facilities. Residents deserve and require timely access to health services to identify health problems and receive appropriate treatment. Telehealth services in SNFs will allow residents to access healthcare without delay and will avoid unnecessary transport and transfer to emergency departments. Additionally, Telehealth lowers the risk of disease spread among transport and clinical staff, as well as the broader community. In short, the findings indicate that Telehealth prevents emergency transfers (potential for up to 20%) and there was high patient satisfaction (94%) with Telehealth. There also is anecdotal evidence that indicates: (1) High potential for reducing administrative costs for nurses and other caregivers; (2) Increased involvement of family members in health care planning; and (3) Early engagement of staff about the benefits of Telehealth is essential. We encourage you to retain the full Evaluation Report as a reliable future refer, particularly the compelling Lessons Learned.

The Pilot Project subsequently informed a larger Telehealth project funded by the Federal Communications Commission COVID-19 Telehealth Program. CETF in partnership with Los Angeles Jewish Health was awarded over \$860,000 to implement Telehealth with 10 organizations, including SNFs, Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Community Clinics, Tribal Clinics, and a Critical Access Hospital. This project is underscoring the necessity to invest resources to train staff, build provider capacity, and facilitate connections to medical centers to optimize Telehealth. A Final Report will be released in Summer 2023.

These projects along with Fact-Finding Convenings<sup>1</sup> and many years of experience in Telehealth have informed the CETF Vision Goal for Telehealth:

Optimize the use of Telehealth to augment and enhance health and medical care for all California residents – especially those who are medically-underserved – to improve individual patient outcomes and overall population health.

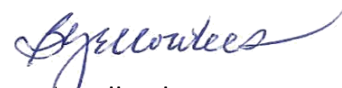
This vision requires the Legislature to establish State policy to institutionalize Telehealth in California with accountability for improving patient outcomes and overall population health in terms of quantified performance metrics. Telehealth policy must go beyond reimbursement regulations to ensure implementation of Telehealth by all providers, especially for those serving the most disadvantaged communities and residents so that all Californians have access to quality health and medical care.

CETF invites you to join us to advance “Telehealth for All” in legislation. For additional information, please contact Leticia Alejandrez, CETF Director of Telehealth and Human Services at: [Leticia.Alejandrez@cetFund.org](mailto:Leticia.Alejandrez@cetFund.org).

Sincerely,



Sunne Wright McPeak  
President and CEO



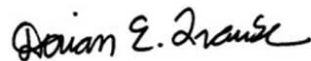
Barb Yellowlees  
Chair, CETF Telehealth Committee



State Senator Martha Escutia (Ret.)  
CETF Telehealth Committee



Jim Kirkland  
CETF Telehealth Committee



Dorian Traub  
CETF Telehealth Committee

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cetfund.org/report/delivering-on-the-promise-of-telehealth-to-improve-health-status-in-california/>