

**For Immediate Release**

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**At the Crossroads: NRTRC White Paper Examines Trends Driving the  
Convergence of Telehealth, EHRs and HIE**

SPOKANE, Wash. – (May 11, 2010) – From the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the newly passed healthcare reform legislation to emerging reimbursement models and shifting consumer health trends, a confluence of events are driving radical change in the nation's healthcare system and bringing about the convergence of telehealth, electronic health records (EHRs) and health information exchange (HIE).

That is the focus of "The Crossroads of Telehealth, Electronic Health Records & Health Information Exchange: Planning for Rural Communities," a new white paper from the [Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center](#) (NRTRC).

"Accelerating adoption and utilization of telehealth technologies, telemedicine in particular, will be critical to a successful stakeholder response to the disruptive changes that are underway in healthcare," said NRTRC Executive Director Christina B. Thielst, FACHE. "By leveraging telehealth networks and their existing infrastructures, Regional Extension Centers, HIEs and other data-sharing initiatives will be better-positioned to fulfill their commitments to the healthcare delivery system of the future – a system in which even the most rural and remote populations have timely access to care and their health records."

The white paper explores emerging trends and recent disruptors impacting the healthcare delivery system and examines the opportunities they present for the advancement of telecommunications-based health solutions and the broadband infrastructure available through telehealth networks. It also takes an in-depth look at the various uses of telehealth and the most common delivery models of telemedicine, as well as the role of the telehealth network and Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) in expanding the reach of these vital initiatives.

Finally, the white paper highlights the evolution of the REACH Montana Telehealth Network from facilitating tele-radiology at three remote sites into a consortium of healthcare providers at 18 sites linked by high-bandwidth telecommunications in the north central region of Montana. REACH, which considers HIE to be a primary function,

is currently working to leverage its existing T1 infrastructure to create the “railroad tracks” that will carry medical data and information within the region and beyond.

“This white paper is an excellent analysis of the intersection of telehealth and health information technology, and the opportunities and challenges this electronic technology will bring to rural America,” said Terry J. Hill, Executive Director of the Rural Health Resource Center, the Duluth, Minn.-based national knowledge center for rural hospitals providing technical assistance, information, education and other resources to rural health care providers and their communities.

Adds Thielst: “*Crossroads* is a valuable planning tool for any healthcare stakeholder, but it is especially important for rural communities wanting to address health information exchange. It is just one of many resources available through the NRTRC to help advance the involvement of telehealth networks in HIE initiatives and to help transform the telehealth infrastructure into the ‘superhighway’ across which remote and rural areas will finally be able to participate in the widespread exchange of electronic health information.”

One of five TRCs in the nation, the NRTRC leverages the collective expertise of 33 telehealth networks across Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and United States-affiliated Pacific Islands to share information and resources which assist in the development of new telehealth programs. The NRTRC is focused on further growth and new provider adoption of telehealth technologies to enhance delivery systems and reduce organizational and patient costs.

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**About the NRTRC:** The [NRTRC](#) is a consortium of experienced telehealth networks, governed by a board of directors, serving as an information agent and a telehealth community-building organization. It was created to facilitate the ongoing development of existing and new telehealth networks through opportunities for education, training, strategic planning and subject matter expertise related to telehealth and telemedicine network creation, growth and maintenance.

**About the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth:** [HRSA's Office for the Advancement of Telehealth](#) (OAT) was established to serve as a leader in telehealth, a focal point for HRSA's telehealth activities and as a catalyst for the wider adoption of advanced technologies in the provision of health care services and education. The office leads, coordinates and promotes the use of telehealth technologies by: fostering partnerships within HRSA, and with other Federal agencies, states and private sector groups to create telehealth projects; administering telehealth grant programs; providing technical assistance; developing distance learning and training programs; assessing technology investment strategies; evaluating the use of telehealth technologies and programs; developing telehealth policy initiatives to improve access to quality health services and promoting knowledge exchange about "best telehealth practices."

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