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NEW ACAP REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PLAN INITIATIVES, CHALLENGES IN EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH TELEMEDICINE

WASHINGTON – A recent report from the Association for Community Affiliated Plans (ACAP) highlights the efforts of five ACAP-member Safety Net Health Plans to deploy telemedicine in an effort to meet the needs of a growing member base. Telemedicine is one strategy for health plans to maximize their network capacity in order to meet the primary and specialty care needs of individuals and families, including those who recently gained coverage through the expansion of the Medicaid program.

Telemedicine can help expand access to needed care, facilitate better care coordination and help contain costs. It can particularly help patients who live in areas with few or no specialists to get the care they need more quickly and more conveniently—sometimes sparing them a long trip to see a specialist. It can also help specialists dispense care more efficiently, providing consults to primary care physicians (PCPs) and providing direct access for patients with more complex needs.

The report profiles the efforts of five Safety Net Health Plans to implement telemedicine:

- **San Francisco Health Plan**, which funded the development of an electronic referral system that allows for better evaluation and response to referral requests as well as direct consultation with the primary care provider when appropriate;
- **Colorado Access**, which has helped to launch two organizations dedicated to improving collaboration and integration through telemedicine and delivering services through real-time videoconferencing and other technologies;
- **Community Health Plan of Washington**, where behavioral health coordinators and consulting psychiatrists use teleconferencing to provide consultation, screening and treatment in a primary care setting;
- **Partnership HealthPlan of California**, which deployed telemedicine in three clinics in rural areas to improve access to specialty care for its members in northern California, and
- **Driscoll Health Plan**, which implemented a telepsychiatry program in an effort to address a severe shortage of child psychiatrists in its service area.

“Safety Net Health Plans are doing everything they can to assure that their members are connected to the care they need, and telemedicine is a proven strategy for improving access to care,” said ACAP CEO Margaret A. Murray. “Some of these plans have developed terrific programs that have led to shorter wait times for—or shorter drive times to—specialty care. Others have used it to address provider shortages.”

The paper discusses lessons learned common to most or all of the telemedicine initiatives, and points out several challenges that plans face in implementing such programs, such as the need for state regulations and Medicaid contracts to be updated in a way such that health plans have the flexibility they need to implement telemedicine programs.



“A thoughtful update to contracts and regulations that would reflect such changes in technology would go a long way towards helping these programs thrive,” added Murray. “Patients will notice and appreciate the difference.”

The fact sheet is available at www.communityplans.net.

About ACAP

ACAP represents 58 nonprofit Safety Net Health Plans in 24 states, which collectively serve more than twelve million people enrolled in Medicaid, Medicare, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and other public health programs. For more information, visit www.communityplans.net.

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