

UAMS News Bureau

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**UAMS Rural Telehealth Center Receives \$1.5 Million
to Evaluate Broadband Pilot Program’s COVID-19 Response**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Rural Telehealth Evaluation Center has received a \$1.5 million federal grant to evaluate the performance of the Telehealth Broadband Pilot Program in preventing, preparing for and responding to COVID-19.

The Health Resources & Services Administration’s Federal Office of Rural Health Policy awarded the grant for the evaluations in four counties in separate regions of the United States. The center is a part of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and specializes in the assessment of digital health solutions from effectiveness to financial perspectives.

“UAMS has been a leader in digital health for many years, and we are excited to use that experience in determining what methods and technologies can be of best use to rural providers in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Joseph Sanford, M.D., the institute’s director. “From this grant we will also give policymakers needed data and analyses to advance digital health in rural America.”

In August, the institute received a four-year \$3.8 million grant to establish the Rural Telehealth Resource Center. With the additional funding of \$1.5 million, the center will evaluate the use of digital health technologies to reduce the risk of COVID-19, assess the readiness to respond to COVID-19 using them and analyze their effectiveness in limiting the spread of the disease.

Led by Hari Eswaran, Ph.D., the institute’s director of research, the institute’s researchers will examine how well digital health works in four communities which are combatting COVID-19. Their research findings about digital health and the pandemic will help to focus funding where it can be of the most help in underserved rural areas.

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In its research, the center will work in collaboration with the university's College of Medicine, College of Pharmacy and College of Public Health. The grant funding is provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

“Because of longstanding disparities in access to health care in rural areas, especially access to specialists, wisely using the financial resources we have in digital health to close those gaps is vital to improving care there,” Eswaran said. “The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the need to improve access in rural settings.”

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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