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For Immediate Release

**FCC'S CONNECT2HEALTH TASK FORCE ANNOUNCES
DATA UPDATE FOR BROADBAND HEALTH MAPPING PLATFORM**

Releases Updated Priority Lists, Encourages Public-Private Collaboration

WASHINGTON, June 08, 2017 – The Federal Communications Commission’s Connect2Health Task Force today announced updates to its *Mapping Broadband Health in America* platform (available at www.fcc.gov/health/maps). The 2017 platform now reflects the latest complete annual fixed broadband dataset from the Commission and updated health data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s County Health Rankings. As telehealth, telemedicine, and other cutting-edge mHealth initiatives gain momentum across the country, this web-based mapping platform enables more efficient, data-driven decision making at the intersection of broadband and health.

“As a famous writer once said, ‘data are just summaries of thousands of stories,’” said Michele Ellison, Chair of the Connect2Health^{FCC} Task Force. “This critical update to the Task Force’s mapping platform unpacks the broadband health realities faced by communities nationwide and makes them easily accessible to the public and decision-makers.”

For example, understanding the data is the first step in better leveraging broadband to help manage chronic health conditions for seniors in Giles County, Tennessee, access lifesaving specialty care in Harlan County, Kentucky, reduce post-surgical pain through Virtual Reality applications in Barbour County, West Virginia, or connect a veteran to virtual rehab in Warren County, Pennsylvania. That is why the mapping platform is an interactive experience, enabling detailed study of the intersection of connectivity and health for every state and county in the United States. The data update reinforces many of last year’s key findings, including sizeable and persistent rural/urban gaps. Notably, counties that need broadband for health the most, tend to have it the least. Forty-two percent of rural “critical need” counties, representing over 2 million people, had worsening broadband *and* health metrics.

“We recognize that the upturn in closures of rural hospitals and medical facilities, highlighted in recent research at the University of North Carolina, is of great concern to many,” added Ms. Ellison. “The mapping platform shines a critical spotlight on the need for broadband health solutions in rural and digitally-isolated counties where physician shortages are more than double the national average. It also demonstrates the importance of initiatives to promote broadband infrastructure deployment.”

Along with the data update, the Task Force has released new priority lists of “critical need” counties in broadband and health—the *Priority 2017* and *Rural Priority 2017*. The Task Force also introduced a new analytical product—the *Positive Trend Counties* inventory—that compares broadband and health data year on year (e.g., comparing broadband data from December 2014 to December 2015). This new inventory identifies priority counties that the data shows have made progress on broadband

and/or health measures to a greater or lesser extent, no longer meeting the thresholds as “critical need” counties in broadband and health.

Other key findings include:

- The number of people living in “double burden” counties has increased. Almost half of U.S. counties have high burdens of chronic disease (e.g., diabetes) as well as a need for greater broadband connectivity. That translates to over 36 million people who live in counties with a “double burden” of need—an increase of 1 million between 2014 and 2015.
- Over 60% of rural Americans live in “double burden” counties, while less than 5% of urban America falls into the same category. The rural/urban gap holds true even if the benchmarks are set at 80%, 70%, or 60% broadband access.
- There are 214 counties—175 of which are majority rural – that have broadband access below 50% and diabetes and obesity rates above the national average. These digitally-isolated counties are home to nearly 7 million people.
- Preventable hospitalizations (i.e., hospital stays that could have been avoided with appropriate care) are 150% higher in the least connected counties compared to other counties.
- Some counties did experience significant positive trends in broadband access, such as Upshur County, Texas, and Monroe County, Georgia, both reporting broadband access increases of 60% or more.

The fixed broadband data in the mapping update was released in December 2016 covering data submissions as of December 2015. The health data is drawn from the 2017 release of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings & Roadmap. This map data update provided the Task Force with an opportunity to look at broadband and health data between years.

To review this year’s data products (the *Priority 2017*, *Rural Priority 2017*, *Positive Trend Counties*, *Key Findings*), our sample maps and a tutorial on how to use the platform, please visit www.fcc.gov/health/maps.

In the coming months, the Task Force will continue to focus on rural and underserved communities and will work to catalyze public-partnerships in these counties. Parties interested in these efforts may contact the Task Force at engage2h@fcc.gov.

The Connect2Health^{FCC} Task Force also welcomes suggestions and feedback as it continues to enhance the mapping platform. Comments or additional data concerning enhancements to the mapping platform can be submitted in response to the Public Notice on Broadband-Enabled Health Care Solutions and Technologies (GN Docket 16-46), available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-seeks-comment-accelerating-broadband-health-tech-availability>.

To learn more about the Connect2Health^{FCC} Task Force, please visit www.fcc.gov/health.

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