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Broadband Access Critical To Health Care

My Turn

By ROBERT MACCANI

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When people think of New Hampshire, they think healthy. But those of us who live here know specialty care is more accessible in the central and southern areas of our state. For the well-being of all residents, we must find a cure for this if the Granite State is to retain its reputation as a place where healthy people live.

The things that make New Hampshire look healthy - our mountains, our open land and our bracing winter weather - also make health-care delivery difficult. Our mountain areas isolate us from primary and specialty medical care. Some of our rural populations are underserved. Frequent and prolonged hazardous driving conditions can make it difficult to keep medical appointments.

New Hampshire is a perfect candidate for telemedicine. Telemedicine is the transfer of electronic medical data - images, sounds, live interactive video and patient records – from one place to another, preferably at high speeds and without interruption. Telemedicine can improve public-health delivery, support long-distance clinical care, health administration and patient and professional health-related education.

For all its rural expanses, New Hampshire also has several resource-rich medical centers, which can provide specialty care across the state through telemedicine.

Broadband networks today, particularly those running over fiber optics, run at the speeds and capacities necessary to make interactive exchanges - whether voice, data or video - simultaneous. Telecommunications companies will continue to expand broadband infrastructure, investing perhaps \$70 billion this year.

This next wave of broadband innovation promises significant, life-enhancing advances in telemedicine. New Hampshire must attract broadband investment and deployment so more citizens can get health care via telemedicine.

We are an aging state. The proportion of New Hampshire's population classified as elderly is expected to triple in 20 years. Whether it is telemedicine's home health care, remote monitoring or interactive access to medical specialists in distant cities, residents will increasingly benefit from broad-based telemedicine initiatives.

New Hampshire needs the high-speed, high-capacity networks that carry its telemedicine's life-saving data, images and words. We must avoid internet regulation or other actions that could deter broadband investment and delay telemedicine applications.

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