
Title **0016** 11/02/2023

by **Jennifer Ellis** in **Digital Equity Public Comment (English)** id. 44599868

100 East First Avenue
PO Box 1384
Hutchinson, Kansas
67504
United States
3612291833
jennifer@healthfund.org

Original Submission 11/02/2023

Please provide your first and last name Jennifer Ellis

Please provide email address jennifer@healthfund.org

Please provide a telephone number if applicable +13612291833

If you are affiliated with an organization, please provide the organization name United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

If you are affiliated with an organization, please share a brief paragraph about your organization and its work in promoting digital equity The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 37-year-old, \$60-million health philanthropy located in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas—access to care, Thriving Children, and Engaged Congregations and Communities, a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

If affiliated with an organization, please provide a link to website healthfund.org

Who is your main point of contact if we have further questions? Please provide their name and the best method to communicate with them if they are not the commentor on this form

David Jordan, david@healthfund.org

Is there any additional background information you would like our office to know?

Please rank the Kansas digital equity plan on how it accomplishes the following:

Question 1: Outlines the current state of digital equity in Kansas Very well

Question 2: Outlines a vision for digital equity in Kansas that recognizes the state's unique social and economic circumstances Very well

Question 3: Identifies the barriers to digital equity faced by each of the state's covered populations Very well

Question 4: Establishes an implementation strategy to achieve digital equity Very well

<p>Question 5: Describes how Kansas will coordinate and conduct outreach amongst digital equity partners and stakeholders</p>	<p>Very well</p>
<p>Question 6: Describes how Kansas will coordinate its use of DEA funding with any funds it will receive in connection with BEAD or other digital equity funding</p>	<p>Very well</p>
<p>Question 7: Identifies the assets available to help connect Kansas' covered populations</p>	<p>Very well</p>
<p>Question 8: If there are any digital equity assets that you feel have not been listed in the digital equity plan, please list them here</p>	
<p>Question 9: Please indicate which sections of the Kansas digital equity plan you are providing comment on</p>	<p>Other section not listed or general comments</p>
<p>Please provide comment on any other section not listed, or provide general comments on the digital equity plan</p>	<p>According to the Kansas Health Institute, nearly 30% of all Kansans lack adequate internet access. This includes those that do not have high-speed internet in their area and those that do not have access to a proper device. Additionally, University of Kansas researchers found that up to 1 million Kansans live in regions that lack access to high-speed broadband services at adequate speeds. Addressing gaps in high speed internet access and devices is critical to improving health and ensuring more civically engaged communities.</p> <p>We are in strong support of Governor Kelly's Kansas Digital Equity (DE) Plan for high-speed internet connectivity which will effectively address the gap in broadband accessibility. This plan outlines digital skills training,</p>

affordable service plans, and the availability of broadband-ready devices as top priorities. We agree that these areas are the key components of digital equity. We support additional plans from Governor Kelly and the Kansas Office of Broadband Development like the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan (FYAP).

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 37-year-old, \$60-million health philanthropy located in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas—access to care, Thriving Children, and Engaged Congregations and Communities, a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

The Health Fund continues to support statewide measures to address digital inclusion because finding solutions to this issue means improving social determinants of health. As a health foundation, we work to ensure families can access telehealth services through reliable means when and where they need it. At the Health Fund, we will continue to be an active supporter in fighting for digital equity in Kansas.

As a statewide health philanthropy, we are excited to share our support for Governor Kelly's plan and shine light on a few key elements that are especially important to our mission. Two key components of our work include supporting all Kansans in the opportunity to access healthcare and thrive as engaged members of their communities. As a foundation that supports all Kansans having the opportunity to benefit from accessible and affordable broadband high-speed internet, we appreciate the State's willingness to continually and actively address this issue.

Making digital inclusion and adequate broadband high speed internet access a reality for all Kansans means building upon our strengths and addressing our challenges with solid solutions supported by our communities and our leadership. This includes:

- Ensuring the development of digital infrastructure that serves all Kansans and eliminates redlining of communities.
- Creating access to programs that make the internet affordable for all Kansas families.
- Supporting consumer assistance, navigators and community health workers that help families access programs, address technical concerns and build digital literacy.

Telehealth

Meeting the healthcare needs of rural Kansas involves telehealth and making it readily available and reliable. Addressing smart and efficient development of broadband access is vital to successful telehealth implementation. This includes all three key areas: digital infrastructure, affordability and engaging community health workers and navigators.

In 2022, the Health Fund and REACH Healthcare Foundation partnered for a closer look at provider and patient experiences with telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Valuable information applicable beyond the pandemic was gathered as well. Namely, the favorability of this option for patients

able to access it - with 86% of those surveyed in favor of supporting expansion of telehealth options.

Telehealth may be utilized for a follow-up appointment in conjunction with in-patient visits, medication consultations, mental health check-ups and regular check-ups. Having access to telehealth services through appropriate broadband services allows patients to stay with the same provider and experience expanded access to mental health services.

Community Health Worker and Navigators

Community health workers and navigators are a key ingredient to broadband access. Community health workers are trusted members of the communities they serve and are leveraged to assist others in accessing services, applying for programs and utilizing access options. In addition, broadband access also enables CHWs to meet with their patients when appropriate. CHWs are often in the same communities and experiencing the same broadband challenges, which may impact their ability to obtain training. Supporting this element of internet access is just as important as maintaining infrastructure.

Access to high-speed internet means a better connected, better served, healthier Kansas. To effectively address the many dynamics it takes to bring usable and accessible broadband to all Kansans, including building broadband infrastructure and supporting affordable reliable connections through appropriate devices, requires thoughtful policies and programs such as KOBD and Governor Kelly are proposing. The policy measures and program initiatives needed to reach this goal should continue to be celebrated priorities that are delivered upon.

Jennifer Ellis 11.2.2023

By submitting this form for public comment and evidence to support your comment, you are accepting responsibility for the accuracy of the information submitted and that it is true and correct to the best of your knowledge. You agree to be contacted by the Kansas Office of Broadband Development, Kansas Department of Commerce should the need arise. Furthermore, by making this submission, you understand that Kansas Department of Commerce and the Office of Broadband Development reserve the right to publicly publish your comment and evidence provided. Falsification of information will result in rejection of future public comment submissions and could result in legal action. Please type your name and today's date in the text box below.
