Broadband and Health Care Technology
HMSA's *Online Care* Program

HMSA
An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross
and Blue Shield Association

Jennifer Diesman
Assistant Vice President
HMSA Government Relations
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Making broadband technology work for health care

HMSA's Online Care

Hawaii: On the cutting edge of health care technology utilizing broadband

- HMSA is the first health plan in the country to collaborate with two leading national corporations, American Well and Microsoft, to make online health care services available to all Hawaii residents in January 2009.

- With this new service, consumers can talk to a physician live and on-demand via the Web or phone.

To meet consumer needs, health care is changing through the use of technology

- Internet-based technology has revolutionized the way Americans acquire goods and services in many industries.

- In health care, this online revolution has provided patients access to health information, but not health care services.

- According to a study by the California Health Care Foundation, 78 percent of health care consumers want to interact with physicians online.

- A 2006 Gartner study reports that more than 85 percent of physicians are looking to streamline their operations using the Internet, and 90 percent see the Internet as a way to gain a competitive advantage.

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HMSA's *Online Care* will provide on-demand access to health care services

- Convenient and easy to use.

- Available 24 hours a day.

- No appointment necessary.

- Don't have to leave home or the office.

Online services would be on-par with those offered in an office setting

- Counseling/health information/education on health issues, chronic conditions, medications, etc.

- Discuss appropriate emergency or urgent care for patient's situation.

- Consult with patients and recommend follow-up care.

- Prescribe medication as appropriate. (Physicians cannot prescribe narcotics.)

- Complete patient history and recommend lab and diagnostic tests for new patients.

Online Care technology will supplement and improve existing patient care

- HMSA's *Online Care* supports the physician-patient relationship.

- The system can be used for new patient history and to order lab tests before an initial office visit, which is more efficient for the physician and patient.

- Patients who consult with HMSA's *Online Care* for medical questions can be referred to a physician for ongoing care.

- Transcripts of online consultations can be forwarded to the patient's regular physician to help ensure continuity of care.

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Implementation Schedule

- June 2008 - HMSA *Online Care* project publicly announced

- August 2008 – Begin building physician's awareness of HMSA *Online Care*

- August-October 2008 – configuration and testing of system

- December 2008 – Begin enrolling physicians

- December - January: Begin public advertisement campaign
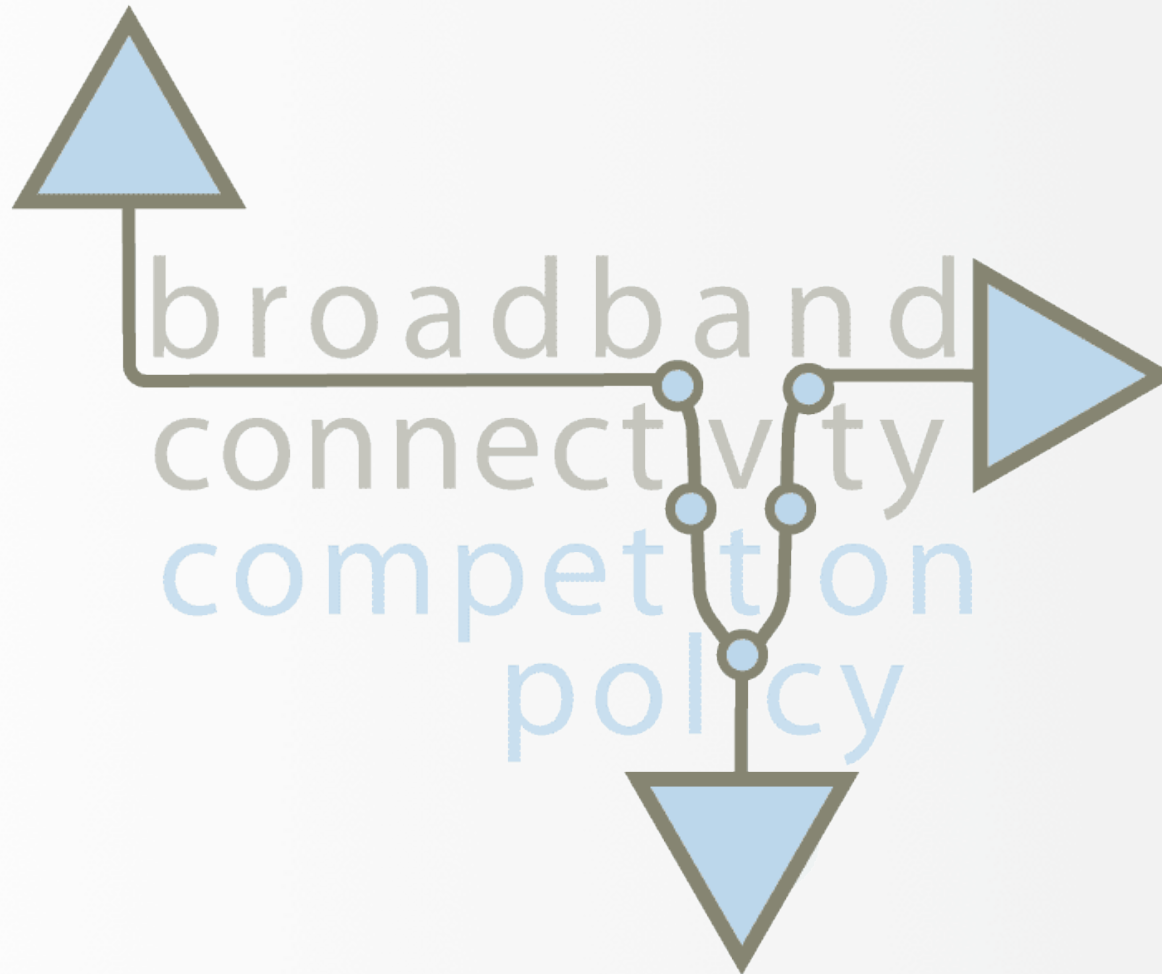
- January 2009 – HMSA *Online Care* is available

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Online Care compliments other efforts to increase access in Hawaii through broadband usage

- HCR 138 which was passed during the 2008 legislative session requests the University of Hawaii Telehealth Research Institute (TRI) to explore the feasibility of further implementation of the telemedicine system's health care services to the benefit of Hawaii residents.

- The Pacific Broadband Telehealth Demonstration Project will link approximately 96 health care facilities throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Island region to serve a population that spans 11 islands. The network will enable rural facilities to communicate with health care specialists, who are concentrated in urban areas, at speeds of up to 10 Gbps.

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HMSA's *Online Care* will use broadband technology to fill the gaps in health care

- HMSA's *Online Care* will improve access to health care statewide.

- Provides another choice for patients and physicians.

- Can help with care access issues faced in some rural areas of the state.

What are the challenges HMSA's *Online Care* may face?

HMSA's Online Care will face challenges

- Changing/Challenging an entrenched way of healthcare delivery.

- Browser compatibility.

- Demographical acceptance of web based services.

- Balancing supply vs. demand.

- Proving online care can have a positive impact on cost of healthcare.

How will Hawaii solve its unique challenges in order to provide statewide access to broadband?

From the Broadband Task Force interim report:

- Initial data suggests that while Hawaii has gaps in availability, the state does not particularly lag other states. Hawaii does however face additional disadvantages inherent in its island geography.

Data will need to further examine the demographics of individuals without access to broadband. It is likely that rural areas lacking access to medical care may also be found to lack access to broadband services. HMSA's *Online Care* can help fill gaps in health care in rural areas as long as access to broadband exists in these areas.

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How can Hawaii remain competitive without expensive technological upgrades?

From the Broadband Task Force interim report:

- Interisland fiber optic systems are required to provide advanced broadband capabilities throughout the State which are more expensive than the terrestrial fiber systems for intra-state infrastructure. Additionally, the most recent fiber optic systems constructed to connect Asia to the U.S. have all bypassed Hawaii due to technological advances.

As more of Hawaii's consumers access health care through programs like *Online Care*, will the state be able to maintain and increase the availability and quality of broadband?

Should Hawaii be supporting changes to the Universal Service Fund?

From the Broadband Task Force interim report:

- The Universal Service Fund (USF) was created to support carriers that serve rural and sparsely populated areas of the country where the cost of providing telephone service is high. Under the Federal Communications Commission's current rules, USF is designed to support the cost of voice telephone service only.

On the national level, the inclusion of funding to increase broadband access under the USF could assist states with large rural areas to provide increased access to broadband technology. Without this federal funding the most rural areas of Hawaii could suffer from lack of broadband. Lack of broadband could prevent efforts such as *Online Care* from being as successful as possible.

What does the future hold for online health care and broadband services?

- Although HMSA's *Online Care* is the first to provide on-demand health care to consumers, other tools offering similar services will likely enter the Hawaii market in the future.

- As the demand for services such as *Online Care* grows and consumers gain confidence in using the internet to access health care, the demand for broadband in Hawaii will continue to increase.

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Questions about *Online Care*?