

\$500,000 grant to start programs of Telemedicine and Telehealth in Puerto Rico ^[1]

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The Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust (PRSTRT) and the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust (PRPHT) have initiated a pilot project to establish Telemedicine and Telehealth programs in Puerto Rico. It consists of the purchase of specialized equipment that will allow remote health services to be offered in the Castañer communities in Lares, Florida, Rincón, Arroyo, Las Marías, Maricao and Culebra.

Aligned with the mission and vision of improving the health of communities in Puerto Rico, the PRPHT Telemedicine Program has joined forces and established collaborations with providers, payers and health service administrators to offer medical services to people who live in remote communities and need specialized medical services.

This initiative is developed with a USDA grant for a total amount of approximately \$500,000. The Department of Health, the School of Medicine of the University of Puerto Rico, the 330 Centers, AARP Puerto Rico; public, private and non-profit organizations have contributed their knowledge and experience to realize a project in order to address the problem of lack of access to health services in Puerto Rico.

"After hurricanes of 2017 in Puerto Rico, the fragility of the health system and the need for access to medical specialists were exposed.", explained Dr. Jose F. Rodríguez Orengo acting director of the PRPHT. "In Puerto Rico, getting an appointment with a specialist doctor can take more than 3 months. This time is critical for those people who suffer from multiple chronic and complex conditions, in which the accurate diagnosis and proper treatment and in time can save the patient's life. A real solution to tackle and solve this problem is Telemedicine." he concluded.

For her part, Dr. Wendy Matos-Negrón, who runs the new Telemedicine program, said her main objective will be to reduce the waiting time so that people can receive services by specialist doctors on time. "The most important thing is that those people who do not have financial resources, medical plan and transportation can be treated remotely in their health service center, where they are usually treated," she highlighted.

As part of the PRPHT initiatives, educational activities and interventions will be carried out about 10 health subjects on to how to prevent diseases and promoting a healthy lifestyle in vulnerable communities through a Telehealth Program. This service will expand the knowledge and scope of health services where schools, community centers, health facilities and communities will be impacted. The Telehealth program is a way to remotely train and educate groups of people on various topics on disease prevention, protection and health promotion.

The Telemedicine and Telehealth programs will allow people to receive services on time, avoid complications and diseases to maintain and protect their health. The purpose of these programs is for participants to take over their health and their community by retaking the hope and strength of how to deal with diseases and natural events.

For more information on the new Telemedicine program, visit www.paralasaludpublica.org [2]

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