

The Expanding Capacity for Health Outcomes (ECHO) Act (S. 2873/H.R. 5395)
Introduced by Senators Hatch and Schatz & Representatives Burgess and Matsui

Rural Health Challenges

- Only about 10 percent of physicians practice in rural areas of the United States despite nearly one-fourth of the population living in these areas.
- Rural areas have higher rates of some chronic diseases and face many challenges, including transportation, connectivity, and isolation.
- It is difficult to recruit health care providers to work in rural and underserved areas, and opportunities for professional development and support in such areas can be difficult.

Project ECHO Model

- Project Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO) is an innovative continuing medical education model that uses interactive videoconferencing to link specialist teams (“hubs”) with primary care providers (“spokes”) in rural and underserved areas. Together, they participate in weekly teleECHO clinics that combine didactic teaching with mentoring and case-based learning. (A Ted talk about Project ECHO by founder Dr. Sanjeev Arora is available here: <http://bit.ly/2gd9ztB>).
- Demonstrated uses of Project ECHO have been numerous and include:
 - Addressing disease conditions and topic areas, including hepatitis C, integrated addictions and psychiatry, chronic pain/headache management, and diabetes;
 - A complex care program offering support to multidisciplinary teams providing primary and behavioral health care to high-need, high-cost patients; and
 - Public health interventions, including addressing H1N1, HIV, and tuberculosis as well as improving health and wellness within Native American populations.

Benefits of Project ECHO model for:

- Patients: Improved access to quality and accessible care, with high patient satisfaction
- Providers: Increased knowledge for providers in rural/underserved areas, with ability to serve as a local resource; improved provider networks; enhanced professional satisfaction and reduced isolation; more access to specialists.
- Health care system: Higher retention of providers in rural/underserved areas; better care delivered in the right place at the right time by the right person; decreased costs (less travel for specialty visits, less hospitalizations and ER visits, better quality of care close to home, and treatment of chronic diseases earlier before complications arise).
- Current health care challenges: Increased number of buprenorphine-trained providers; Quick education of health providers on public health crises such as H1N1; improved provider training for complex mental health disorders.

S. 2873, the Expanding Connectivity for Health Outcomes (ECHO) Act

- The ECHO Act aims to better integrate the Project ECHO model—referred to as a “technology-enabled collaborative learning and capacity-building model”—into health systems across the country. The HELP manager’s amendment to S. 2873 condenses the original three studies into one and condenses the requirements. The revised bill does the following:
 - Requires a study at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regarding the model and its impact on addressing certain disease conditions, health care workforce issues, the implementation of public health programs, and the delivery of health care services in underserved areas.
 - The report must also analyze the model’s use, impact, and barriers, and outline opportunities for increased adoption of such models, efficiencies and potential cost savings from such models, ways to improve health care through such models, and recommendations to advance the use of such models.

Endorsements

1. America's Essential Hospitals
2. American Academy of Dermatology Association
3. American Academy of Neurology
4. American Academy of Pediatrics
5. American Association for the Study of Liver Disease
6. American Bone Health
7. American Federation of Teachers
8. American Medical Association
9. American Nurses Association
10. American Society of Addiction Medicine
11. Anthem
12. Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
13. Connected Health Initiative
14. Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS)
15. Healthcare Leadership Council
16. LifeWIRE Corp
17. National Association of ACOs
18. National Association of Community Health Centers
19. National Rural Health Association
20. Project ECHO, University of New Mexico School of Medicine
21. University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine
22. University of Utah Health Care, University of Utah