

# Improving rural access to psychiatry services through telemedicine in Carbon County, Wyoming

Carson Walker | RUOP III 2022

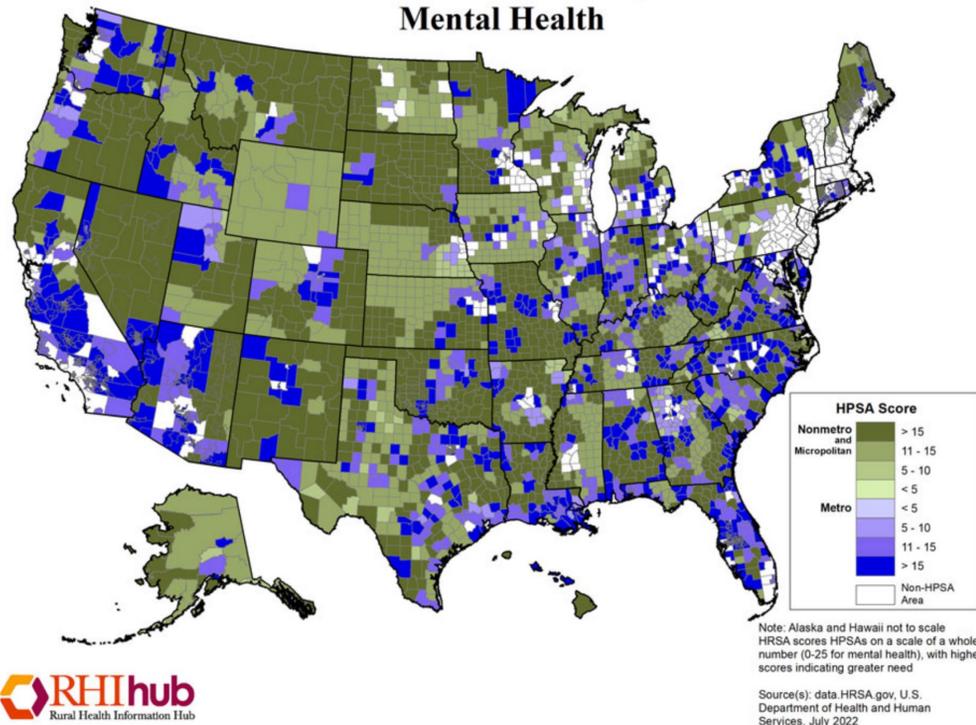
## Hypothesis

Improving regular access to psychiatry services will allow the residents of Carbon County to experience more positive mental health outcomes.

## Community Background

- Carbon County is located in South Central Wyoming. It has approximately 14,000 citizens and covers an area of 8,000 square miles.
- Major businesses are energy sector based with the Sinclair Oil refinery being the main employer. As of July 2022, over 100 employees lost their jobs due to a merger of Sinclair and HollyFrontier.
- Health factors like income, life expectancy, and rates of substance abuse rank Carbon County near the bottom of all Wyoming counties.
- As of the latest Community Health Needs Report, residents rank suicide prevention, improved access to mental health resources, and substance abuse assistance as high priorities.

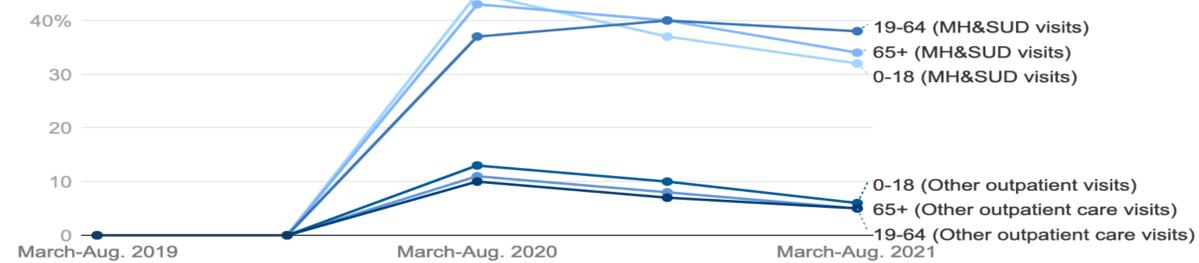
## Health Professional Shortage Areas Mental Health



## Literature Review

- The recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown inadequacies in mental health resources across the nation and world. This lack of appropriate access as well as social distancing restrictions exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions.
- Telemedicine has been shown to be effective in improving access to care and especially specialty services. A review conducted by Speyer et al in 2018 found that telehealth services could be as effective as traditional face-to-face interactions. Utilizing telemedicine for primary and specialty care is likely to become a staple practice in rural areas like Carbon County.
- During times of economic hardship, the prevalence of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation increase.

## Share of outpatient visits delivered by telehealth, by age groups, 2019-2021



NOTE: MH&SUD represents mental health and substance use disorder visits.  
SOURCE: KFF and Epic Research analysis of Cosmos data • PNG



Credit www.kff.org

## Deliverable

- To address Carbon County's desire and need for improved psychiatric care, Memorial Hospital of Carbon County (MHCC) will begin offering telehealth services in three family practice clinics on September 1, 2022.
- The three family practice clinics in Rawlins, Hanna, and Saratoga are in locations that will allow most residents to access care within an hour of their home.
- A flyer (see right) has been distributed to physician offices, mental health professionals, schools, and other community organizations that are in a place to assist with mental health.

## Next steps

- Promote new telepsychiatry services through radio, Facebook, and online announcements.
- Educate residents about other mental health resources such as the National Suicide and Crisis 988 Lifeline and community specific resources.



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