

March 26, 2024

The Hon. Peter Welch  
SR-124 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sen. Welch:

We write as a broad coalition of associations focused on the health and care of Vermonters. Our coalition represents independent and hospital-affiliated health care providers, federally qualified health centers, hospitals, home health agencies, nursing homes, dentists, community mental health and developmental disability agencies, adult day centers, and the Vermont health information exchange. We are writing today to support the extension of the Affordable Connectivity Program subsidies for those that cannot afford broadband.

As a rural state with a rapidly aging population, broadband is essential for providing access to care. The Vermont Department of Health recommends the continuation and expansion of telehealth services to ensure access to mental health services for older Vermonters, those who live in rural areas, those who have a disability or lack transportation, and those who suffer from depression.<sup>1</sup> Telehealth is also valuable for follow-up medical care and can save patients travel time, stress of taking time from work, and related expenses.<sup>2</sup> Financial barriers to broadband is a direct barrier to care.

Right now, over 25,000 Vermont households are enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program, almost half of which are age 50 or older. Winding down the Affordable Connectivity Program in April will deprive vulnerable Vermonters of a crucial lifeline to care. We urge you to maintain access to broadband by supporting the Affordable Connectivity Program Extension Act.

Thank you for the work you do and your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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Beth Anderson  
President & CEO, VITL

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<sup>1</sup> Vermont Department of Health, "Age Strong VT: Our roadmap for an age-friendly state," <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/document/hpdp-bh-age-strong-roadmap2024-2034.pdf#page=39&zoom=auto,-29,661>.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Winstead, National Cancer Institute, "Telehealth Can Save People with Cancer Time, Travel, and Money," Feb. 16, 2023, <https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2023/telehealth-cancer-care-saves-time-money>.

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