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AFHCAN telemedicine program reaches significant milestone in Alaska, expands health care around the world and beyond

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's (ANTHC) AFHCAN Telehealth Solutions telemedicine program recently hit a major landmark, recording its 100,000th telehealth case within the Alaska Tribal Health System. AFHCAN technology allows health care professionals located at the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC) in Anchorage to see and treat patients in Alaska's rural communities. AFHCAN began documenting cases in 2001.

"It's great to celebrate our team's achievement," said Cheryl Moon, Acting Director of AFHCAN, "but it's most exciting to know that we are making a significant difference in helping ANTHC reach its vision of making Alaska Natives the healthiest people in the world."

AFHCAN has improved health care for Alaska Natives and Alaskans around the state and helps make patient care more efficient by cutting down on wait times to see specialists. It's also saved Alaskans and the Tribal Health System more than \$6 million annually in travel expenses and strengthened ANTHC through telehealth services reimbursements.

"Alaskans can be proud that AFHCAN's cutting-edge telemedicine technology came out of our state," said Mandi Constantine, AFHCAN Director of Telehealth Program Development. "It was created to address the unique issues that arise from being the biggest U.S. state which is also 47th out of 50 states in road miles, and 48th out of 50 in doctors-to-people ratio."

AFHCAN was originally created to help Alaskans, but as people in remote locations around the world make use of telemedicine, AFHCAN supports their efforts with hardware, software and training, as well. Alaska and the Lower 48 Indian Health Service sites have more than 400 AFHCAN carts and 60 servers in use. Most recently, AFHCAN's commercial distributor confirmed a sale of 35 carts to the Maldives, an island nation to the southwest of India. AFHCAN's tConsult software is even working in outer space – it was recently used in an international space station by the Canadian Space Agency.

One example of how patient care in Alaska has improved is through the innovative use of telehealth technology is the use of videoconferencing for post-cochlear care for deaf Alaskans. In the past, deaf Alaskans would have to choose between leaving their homes or uprooting their families and move to a metropolitan area for more than a year to receive speech therapy after receiving cochlear implants. With telehealth videoconferencing, Alaska Natives can now stay in their hometowns after a cochlear implant and receive speech therapy through videoconferencing.

The tertiary care hospital for the Alaska Tribal Health system, ANMC receives between 2,500-3,000 cases per year for consultation. Thanks to AFHCAN technology, about 20 percent of those are turned around in 60 minutes, and three quarters are turned around within 24 hours.

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About the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is a non-profit health organization owned and managed by Alaska Native tribal governments and their regional health organizations. For more information, please visit www.anthc.org.