

Telehealth Comes to Ka'ū



Residents can soon
access health care
in their backyard.

By Danielle Douglass

finding a specialist in the rural Ka'ū district on Hawai'i Island isn't always easy. That's because most of the specialists on the island are in Hilo and Kailua-Kona. But Ka'ū residents now have an easier way to see a doctor with a telehealth device called The Health Kiosk.


Located at the Ka'ū Rural Health Community Association in Pāhala, The Health Kiosk makes accessing health care easy and convenient for community members. The kiosk serves residents from the Ocean View, Nīnole, Wai'ōhinu, Nā'ālehu, and Pāhala communities. Anyone living in those communities, including children accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, can use the kiosk for free.

"Many residents have no primary care physician, no insurance, no access to health care, and limited financial resources," says "Auntie" Jessie Marques, executive director of the Ka'ū Rural Health Community Association.

"They often have medical conditions that are treatable, but they don't see a doctor or health care professional and eventually end up in the emergency room or in the hospital."

American Well and HMSA donated The Health Kiosk, which is made by Zivelo, one of the largest kiosk manufacturers in the world. The kiosk will be integrated with American Well's telehealth platform and will be available this summer. In addition to the kiosk, HMSA donated free visits for community members. Natasha Richards, business analyst for HMSA's Online Care®, encourages residents to use the wide array of services that the kiosk offers.

"The kiosk makes it much easier for residents to go to the community center and sit down for a 15-minute visit versus driving an hour and a half or taking the bus to Hilo or Kailua-Kona," says Richards. Another advantage of the kiosk is that residents can get behavioral health services, which is one of the specialist shortage areas.



Coming in summer 2016, Ka'ū residents can use The Health Kiosk at the Ka'ū Rural Health Community Association, 96-3126 Puahala St., in Pāhala. And anyone in Hawai'i can use HMSA's Online Care from their smartphone or tablet. Visit hmsa.com/well-being/online-care for more information and to register.

The kiosk will be located in a separate room to ensure privacy. It's a self-guided touchscreen with a high-definition webcam that lets residents use Online Care to see health professionals.

Launched in 2009 through a landmark agreement between HMSA, Microsoft, and American Well, Online Care enables anyone in Hawai'i to speak with physicians, specialists, mental health professionals, and other health care providers on their computer, smartphone, or tablet. The service is available to HMSA members and nonmembers at little or no charge after they sign up for an Online Care account through My Account on hmsa.com.

The kiosk also features a blood pressure cuff, otoscope, dermatologist, thermometer, pulse oximeter, and a handset for private conversations.

"It's remarkable how rapidly telehealth has grown over the past few years," says Richards. "We've gone from expensive, complicated computer equipment in

doctors' offices and hospitals to immediate access to quality health care with a simple click of a button. We hope that offering the use of the kiosk free of charge to community members will encourage more of them to see a health care professional before their condition gets serious. It's easy, convenient, and completely confidential."

The kiosk also plays a role with interning practical nursing students from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, certified nurse aides, and community health workers who help people use the kiosk and its features.

"The internship is an outreach to the underserved, geographically isolated communities and minorities who are in dire need of access to health care," says Marques. "The students learn about telehealth alternatives while connecting residents to doctors and specialists."

The merging of technology and health care has made it possible for Hawai'i Island residents to get care for themselves and their families. These days, even those who live in rural communities have urban options for their best health and well-being. 