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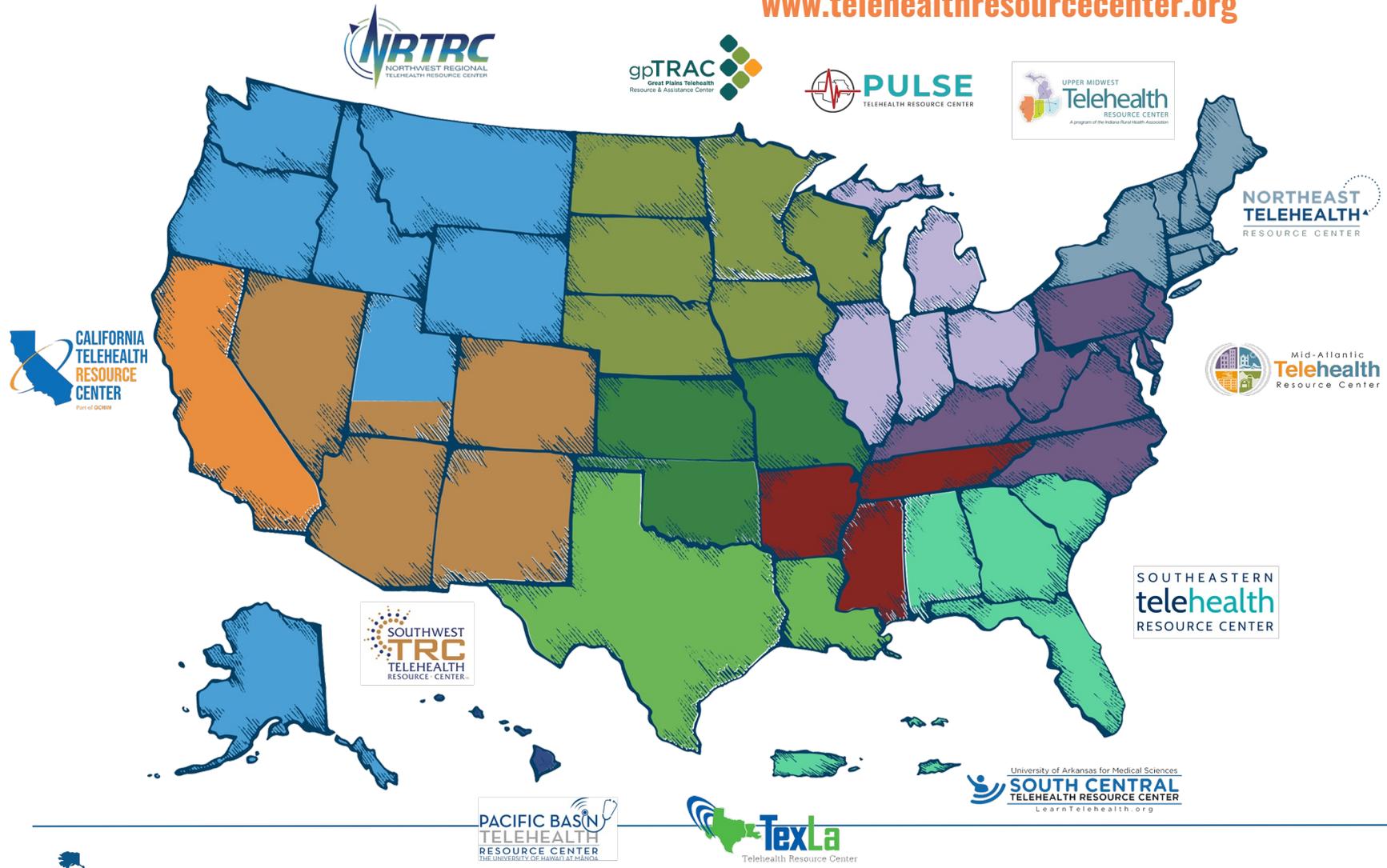
**Increasing Access to Specialist
Expertise in Rural Maine Via
Virtual Curbside Consults**

March 25, 2026



HRSA Funded Telehealth Resource Centers

www.telehealthresourcecenter.org



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- Survey - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TT2RXQZ>



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Improving Access to Specialist Expertise Via Synchronous Virtual Curbside Consultations

Mary Butler-Fleming

*Chief Operating Officer
Community Care Partnership of Maine*



Disclosures & Acknowledgments

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- Any information provided by NETRC is for educational purposes only and should not be regarded as legal advice.
- We do not have any financial interest, arrangement, or affiliation with any organizations related to commercial products or services discussed in this session.
- Many thanks to colleagues throughout the region and beyond for your collaboration and sharing!

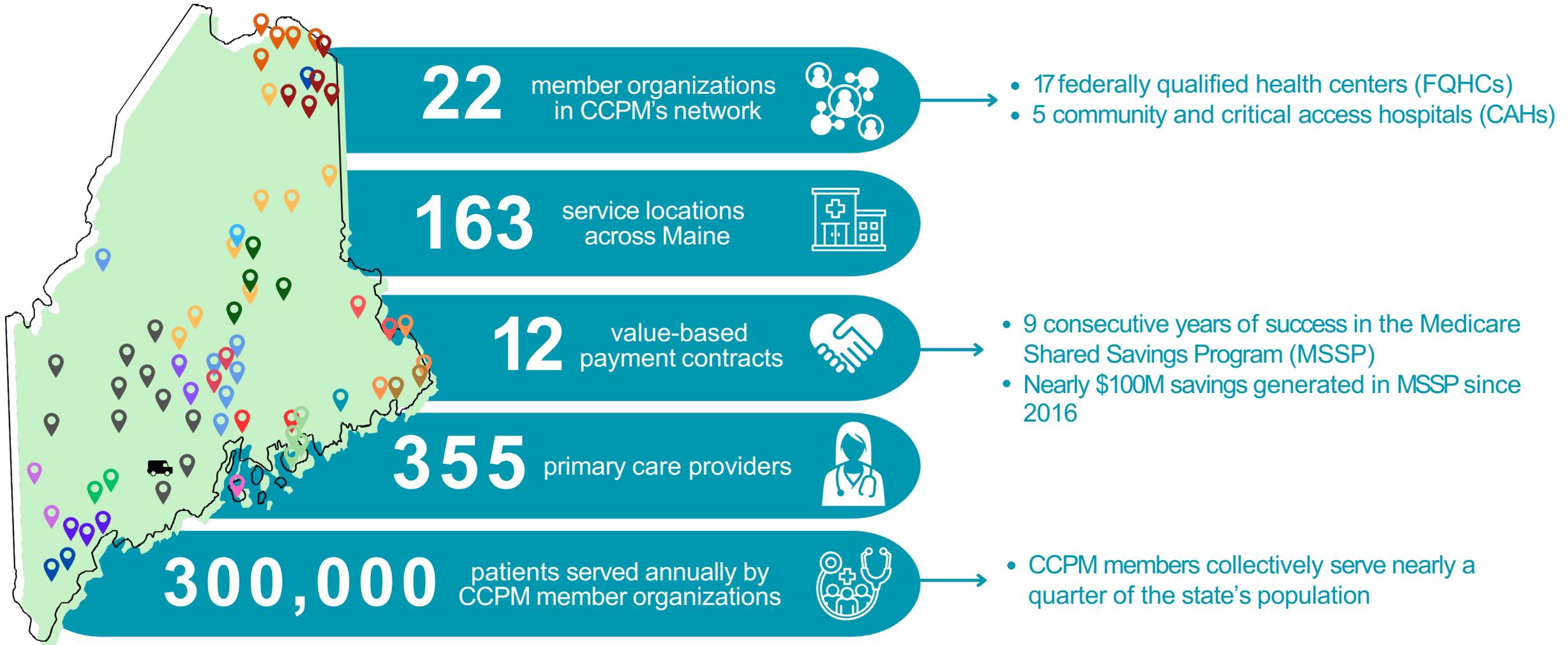


Learning Objectives

- Understand the unique challenges of rural healthcare delivery and how virtual curbside consultations address critical gaps in specialist access
- Describe the implementation and operational model of synchronous virtual curbside consultation programs
- Evaluate the evidence-based benefits and outcomes of virtual curbside consultation programs across multiple stakeholder perspectives
- Apply strategies for sustaining and scaling virtual curbside consultation programs within value-based care models



About Community Care Partnership of Maine: A Public Health Focused ACO/CIN

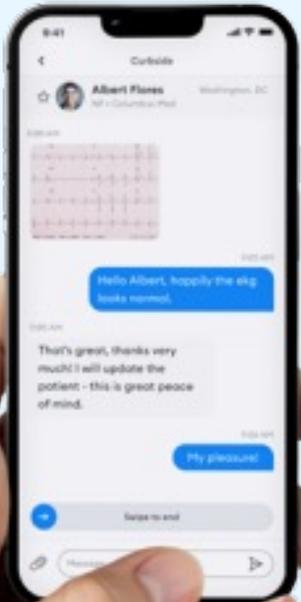




Background & Context

- **Maine is the oldest and most rural state in the nation:** Nearly a quarter of our population is 65+ and more than 60% of our residents reside in rural areas.
- **We face a dire shortage of many specialties:** Maine faces critical shortages of many specialties, particularly cardiologists and rheumatologists, with wait times exceeding 9 months in some cases.
- **Our clinician workforce is often new to practice:** Many clinicians across the CCPM network are NPs and PAs who are new to practice, sometimes practicing without a medical director onsite.
- **Specialist colleagues are rarely co-located with our PCPs:** CCPM's network is comprised mostly of FQHCs focused on delivering primary care; co-located specialist colleagues available for quick hallway consults are a rarity.

Virtual Curbside Consults (PicassoMD)



- Real-time, secure digital interactions that connect PCPs with specialists directly through a mobile app, laptop, or EMR interface.
- Rapid (<30 seconds) access to clinical advice and actionable guidance and recommendations to help resolve challenging cases.

Priority Pilot Sites & Users



ultra rural

sites



sites without
co-located
specialists



NPs & PAs

new to
practice

sites without
co-located
medical
directors



Benefits of Virtual Curbside Consults



improved
access to
specialist
expertise



PCP
maintains
central role
in care



reduced
travel, costs &
time off work



cost
reductions
(avoidable
referrals &
ED visits)



improved
outcomes &
patient
safety



faster
diagnosis &
optimized
therapy



rapid
specialist
input on
complex cases



high-quality
care without
leaving the
community



Who Benefits?



patients & caregivers



primary care providers



accountable care organizations



health centers



health insurance payers



state & federal governments



health-adjacent entities (CDC)



specialists (on & off platform)



Outcomes



100%

of CCPM members
have clinicians using
virtual curbside consults



\$1.25M

total cost savings
generated by using
virtual curbside consults



5,725

curbside consultations
completed since
October 2023



2,006

unnecessary
specialist referrals
avoided



99.9%

provider satisfaction
rate



168

unnecessary emergency
department visits
avoided

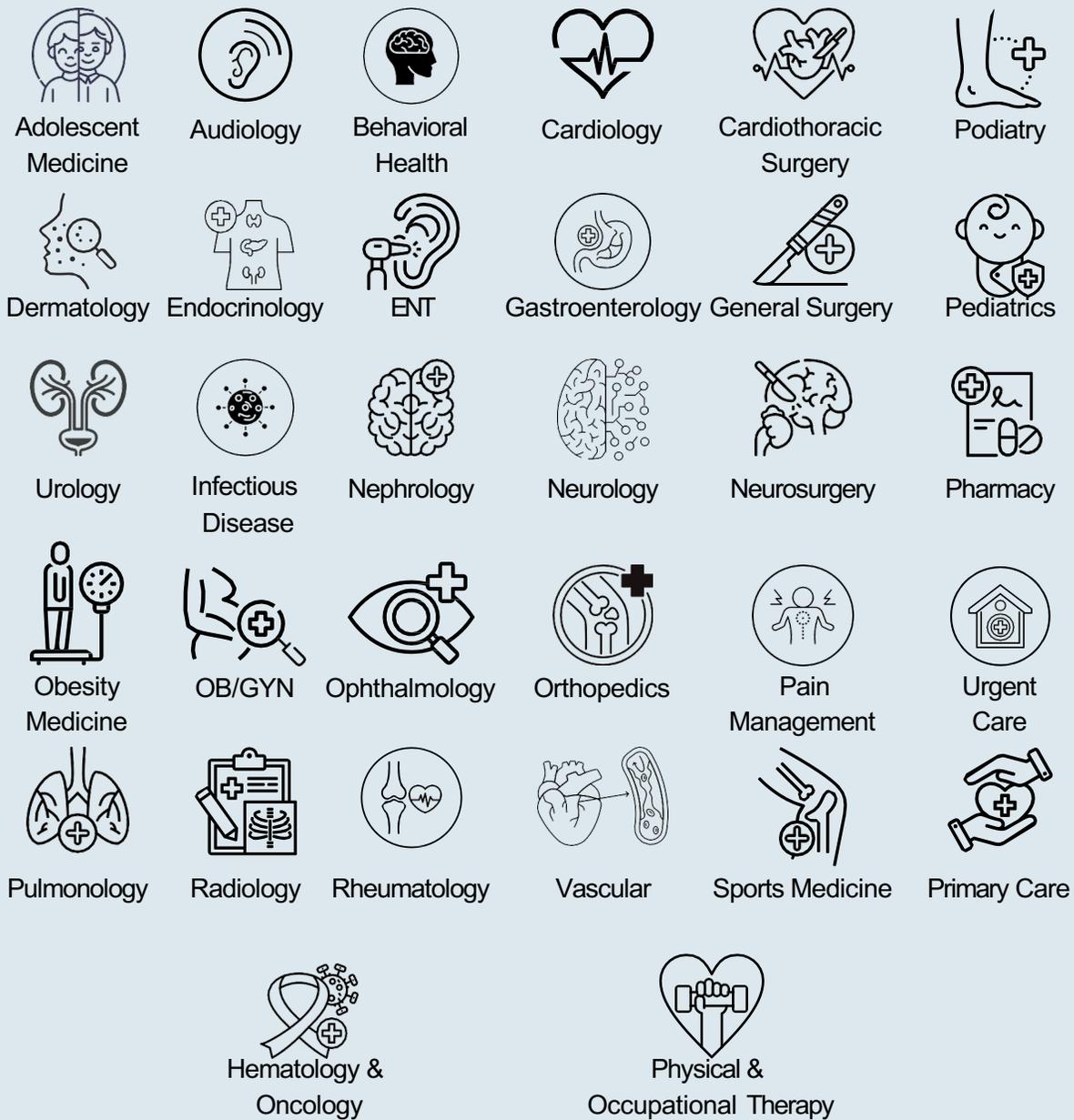
“It is not an over-exaggeration to state that access to curbside consults has **literally saved patients’ lives**. Our patients now have equitable access to timely and appropriate medical care. As a family physician, I feel **renewed joy**.”

Megan Brewer, MD, Former Medical Director
Community Clinical Services

“Having immediate access to curbside consults has been a game-changer. It’s helped us **attract and retain talented clinicians**, knowing they’re backed by a strong specialist network to consult with. Most importantly, it’s **given our patients the access and continuity they deserve**.”

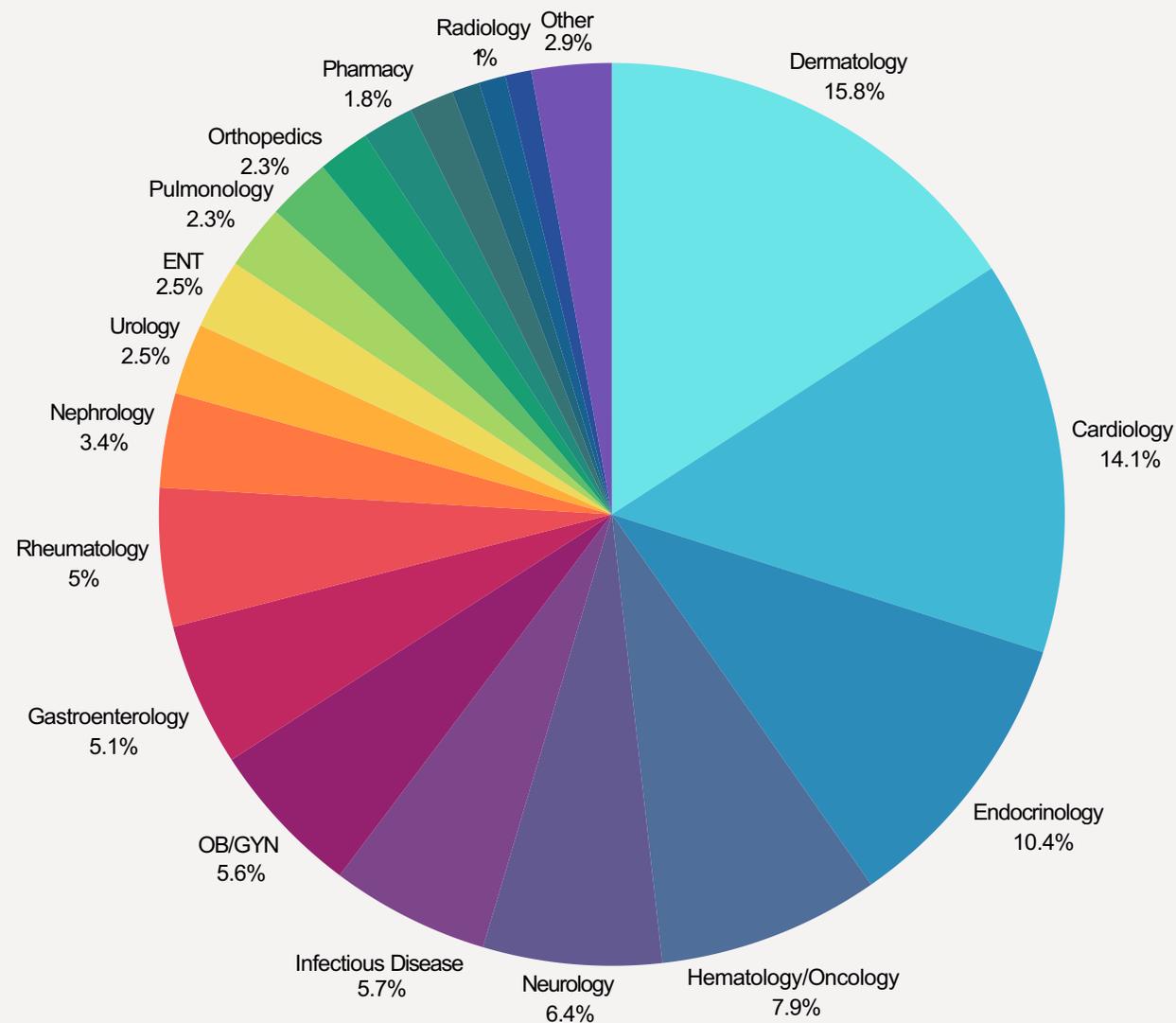
Todd Kitchens, DO, Medical Director
Sacopee Valley Health Center

Specialties Offered



Consult Volume by Specialty

Unsurprisingly, longer wait times associated with higher volume of curbside consults.



CCPM Outcomes (*continued*)

Achieved **statewide utilization**

with 100% of CCPM member organizations now using the tool

Cost coverage secured

(combination of payers and

grants) to **fully offset the cost**

of the tool for all CCPM member

organizations for the next 3

years.

Successful demonstration project

has served as a **springboard for**

additional collaboration





New Work in 2026

- Establishing longitudinal PCP–specialist collaborations for patients with high-risk chronic conditions.
- Proactively identifying high-risk or suboptimally managed patients for targeted, short-term specialist input.
- Integrating AI clinical decision support tools into the workflow to reduce low-acuity specialty consults.
 - Encouraging daily use of teleconsult tools by all PCPs
 - Develop AI CDS systems to optimize timely, appropriate, prioritized specialist referrals.
- Piloting telehealth visits via PicassoMD for highest-demand specialties (guaranteed access to a visit within 7 days vs. several months)

Thank you!



Mary Butler-Fleming

Chief Operating Officer

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Appendix



External Evidence of Proven

Benefit Impact on Utilization &

Costs - Promising by Mixed

- Program evaluations show reduced specialty visits and lower episode costs after implementing synchronous PCP–specialist “curbside” teleconsultations.
 - Savings are driven by fewer unnecessary face-to-face visits and more efficient resource use.
 - Avoiding hospital referrals helps control healthcare costs and benefits patients unable to travel.
- Some analyses report modest or offset savings due to added

Hard Patient-Level Outcomes

(Morbidity, Mortality, Long-term Disease Control)

- Few randomized trials or long-term outcome studies specifically evaluate synchronous PCP–specialist consults using curated data.
- Most available evidence focuses on improved processes, access, and short-term utilization rather than durable clinical outcomes.
- Existing trials generally show non-inferior short-term outcomes for select conditions but lack strong evidence for long-term benefits across specialties.
- Rigorous evidence of direct patient health improvements remains limited; most studies are observational.
- Systematic reviews emphasize the need for better data on morbidity, mortality, and long-term outcomes.
- Some studies suggest virtual consults perform at least as well as usual care for chronic disease management, though comprehensive outcome data are still scarce.



External Evidence of Proven Benefits

Faster Access to Specialist Advice

- Synchronous teleconsultations provide faster access to specialist input compared to traditional referral wait times.
- Primary care providers can quickly schedule or initiate live consultations, sharing concise patient data and test results.
- Studies show that 22–68% of face-to-face referrals can be avoided through these programs.
- Specialist response times typically range from minutes to a few days (refs 1-7)

Immediate Changes in Clinical Management

Fewer Unnecessary In-Person Referrals

- Studies show that many cases result in immediate changes to patient management, such as ordering new tests, initiating therapy, or safely deferring referrals.
- Synchronous cardiology and primary care teleconsultation programs report reduced face-to-face referrals and improved triage for patients requiring in-person specialty care.

Patient & Clinician Experience

- Surveys and qualitative studies show high clinician satisfaction when interactions are structured and PCPs present curated data.
- Specialists provide focused recommendations, and PCPs value rapid education and decision support.
- Patients generally view teleconsultations positively for convenience and continuity of care.
- Some patients express concern about managing complex cases remotely.



Well Received by Primary Care Providers



simple and easy to use



increased sense of support



improved care for patients



reduced stress



vital to safely practicing in rural Maine



increased productivity



dread the thought of practicing without it



universally loved

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The NCTRC Webinar Series

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Hosting TRC: Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center (NRTRC)

Telehealth Topic: Data Interoperability: What's Changing, What It Means, and How to Prepare

Date: April 16, 2026

Times: 11 AM – 12 PM (PT)



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