

American Association of People with Disabilities Conference
Where Rehabilitation and Broadband Technologies Intersect
Remarks of Keynote Speaker
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Good morning and welcome. I appreciate the opportunity to keynote the first session this morning, Applications in Employment, Health and Wellness. As the commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, it is my honor to speak with you today.

The focus of this conference and the work that you represent is consistent with the president's focus on Winning the Future through Innovation. Any such efforts should include the employment of individuals with significant disabilities needs as a part of our strategy for global competitiveness and economic recovery.

The focus of this conference also is consistent with the commitment of the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, or OSERS. One of OSERS goals is to create stronger links between research and development and innovation to improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Your work reflects the conduct of research that promotes maximizing the capacity of society to provide fuller opportunities and supports for more participation by individuals with disabilities. With the investments of OSERS' National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (or NIDRR) and other resources, your work reflects the commitment of OSERS to support research and demonstration on the effective use of innovative, emerging and universally designed technologies.

Telerehabilitation is important to the work of the Rehabilitation Services Administration in three key areas: the provision of vocational rehabilitation services (especially to better meet the needs of low-incidence populations and provide specialized professional expertise in rural and remote areas); the provision

of independent living services (again to extend our capacity in rural and remote areas); and the provision of professional development for vocational rehabilitation staff and partners (especially through the use of accessible distance education programs).

We will continue to see an increase in the use of new technologies in our field as we benefit from the Internet, wireless applications, high-speed broadband and cloud computing.

The questions we need to ask to promote telerehabilitation include:

- What role can broadband technologies play in facilitating fuller societal participation of those with disabilities, and how can such technologies assist educators, researchers, businesses and policy makers to view youths and adults with disabilities as critical components in America's economic recovery?
- Once broadband technologies are more fully integrated into society, what will it take to enable youths and adults with disabilities to succeed in a global economy?
- What role can broadband technologies play in substantially increasing access to and the improvement outcomes from the current system of education and training that is offered for individuals with disabilities?
- What role can broadband technologies play in improving the skills of educators, workforce-preparation staff and employers in assisting individuals with disabilities to gain the skills necessary to succeed in a global economy?

We see telerehabilitation facilitating independence and community integration for individuals with disabilities. Frankly, other countries (South Korea, for example) are far ahead of us in bringing broadband technologies to every household. However, we are currently using telerehabilitation in our work in many instances. Examples include:

- The provision of new ways of coaching, ementoring, wayfinding, video interpreting and peer support.
- The use of broadband technologies to more effectively serve individuals in remote and rural areas.
- The use of remote access to conduct "home visits" more efficiently by extending the provision of information, training and support.
- The provision of virtual demonstrations and assistive technology evaluations.
- The use of broadband technologies to support projects that distribute accessible media and materials (like Bookshare).
- The utilization of these technologies to help reduce travel costs and staff time and allow others to work from home.

And, in general, broadband technologies can reduce social isolation and enable people to communicate more easily, both at home and at work. For example, on a personal level, broadband technologies allow my husband, who still lives in Olympia, Wash., and me to communicate each night face-to-face, while I live and work in Washington, D.C.

Broadband technologies, therefore, have the potential to facilitate and promote greater use of telerehabilitation for those with disabilities, ultimately enabling this sector's fuller contribution to global competitiveness, while increasing individuals' welfare. Thank you for this opportunity to serve as the keynote for the panel that will follow.

Lynnae M. Ruttledge
Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration