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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nex-Tech employee advocates for telehealth on Capitol Hill

Lenora, Kan, 08-17-17 —When it comes to health care in rural America, the obstacles are many, with the distances to travel being first among them. Exposure to chemicals used in farming can increase the rates of certain types of cancer, and rates of other chronic diseases are higher than in urban areas. Because physically getting to a provider is more difficult, these conditions may be more serious by the time they are diagnosed.

Telemedicine, or telehealth, is one answer to some of these concerns, but it has obstacles of its own. On July 18, 2017, a panel met on Capitol Hill to discuss how to overcome them in a session called “Connecting Rural America for Health.” Among the panel participants was Nex-Tech’s Customer Sales Supervisor, Maggie Basgall.

The panel was moderated by Graham Dufault of ACT | The App Association. Their Connected Health Initiative hosted the panel in cooperation with the Congressional Rural Telecom Working Group and NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. More than 60 government representatives were in attendance.

Joining Basgall were Lucie Ide, M.D., Ph.D., CEO of Rimidi Diabetes, Inc., and Paula Boyd, Senior Director of Government and Regulatory Affairs for Microsoft. The panel agreed that chronic conditions are on the rise, and tend to hit rural Americans at a higher rate. About 75% of all health care expenditures are for these conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease.
How important is it to connect rural Americans to telehealth services? Consider that 15% of the U.S. population lives in a rural area, while only 10% of the nation’s physician’s practice there. While there are 134 specialists per every 10,000 urban residents, there are only 40 for every 10,000 rural residents. Telehealth services break down the barriers of time and distance, so people in need of specialty care would certainly benefit from them.

The problem? There are still 24 million Americans without access to broadband services. Low population density makes broadband delivery very expensive. Imagine the hours of time spent laying and maintaining the miles of cabling needed to reach a very small number of people. Historically, the Universal Service Fund (USF) has helped cover the delivery costs that would never likely be recovered with such a small customer base. However, that budget was set with the goal of supporting just legacy telephone service, and not the costly broadband infrastructure needed to adequately provide telehealth services. Even with recent reforms, an additional $110 million per year or more is needed to meet the model of broadband deployment crafted by the FCC.

Nex-Tech is proud to have been a leader in broadband telecommunications for the past 20 years and was honored to have Basgall represent Nex-Tech and NTCA in Washington.

“Despite the regulatory environment and averaging less than 1.5 customers per square mile in our cooperative service area, Nex-Tech has already buried more than 6,500 miles of fiber optic cabling connecting customers throughout our service area,” said Basgall. “Nearly all of our medical providers already have access to up to 1 Gig on fiber optic, and we continually work toward delivering premium services to all of those customers within our footprint.”
Nex-Tech connects thousands of people and businesses through a robust broadband network and cutting-edge technology. Nex-Tech’s powerful fiber-to-the-premise technology delivers the highest quality Internet, with speeds up to 1 Gig, Digital TV, home security, and local and long distance phone service. Nex-Tech also provides an array of enterprise IT solutions including cloud services, Hosted PBX, network security, physical security and surveillance, network operations monitoring and managed services to business clients nationwide. Nex-Tech focuses on providing the best technology and support with the best people. With stores in more than 20 locations and a full-service Help Desk and 24-hour Network Operations Center, Nex-Tech customers are ensured unsurpassed technology and support. Headquartered in Lenora, Kansas, Nex-Tech has been delivering exceptional service for more than 65 years.