Applicant Name: GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP FOR TELEHEALTH INC
Project Title: TeleConnect Georgia for Better Health
Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary ______________________

In Georgia there is a clear relationship between poverty, low broadband adoption, rural populations, and poor health. FCC's 2009 survey states that 40% of those with annual household incomes of $20,000 or less have broadband at home, while 91% with household incomes above $75,000 per year have it. A UGA faculty study published in 2008 on 'Persistent Poverty', reported that 'Georgia ranks near the bottom in U.S. in terms of the overall health of its citizens' and out of the 159 Georgia counties, 108 counties have poor children's health and working age adult health, and 75 counties have persistent poor seniors' health, signaling a decline in the health status of Georgians compared to the rest of the U.S. Given the state of healthcare in Georgia and the tremendous challenge to reach these vulnerable populations, the Georgia Partnership for Telehealth proposes an innovative SBA program called 'TeleConnect Georgia for Better Health' (TCGBH) which will utilize telemedicine, broadband, awareness and education to increase broadband adoption and improve the health outcomes of rural Georgians through access to broadband technologies. The overall approach of the TCGBH program is to leverage the strengths of key community public and private sector stakeholders to address the declining health of Georgia's 91 counties of persistent poverty through improved access to primary care by equipping and expanding the current telehealth broadband network from 133 access points to 197 access points and through education and outreach introducing all, from rural healthcare providers to low income families, to the advantages of using broadband technology to access healthcare services, to share and exchange health information and access the internet to receive health and wellness information. The innovation of the TCGBH Program is demonstrated through the collaborative and steadfast commitment of GPT and its partners to bridge the broadband technology gap, first by connecting the community anchor institutions like hospitals, schools, public health departments & physicians through affordable expansion of the current open access telehealth network to 67 additional community anchor sites leveraging the resources and matching contribution of Georgia Public Web and the Georgia Trauma Commission; then secondly, to raise awareness of the benefits of connecting to broadband for better health with marketing campaigns & education of the rural physicians & non-physician practitioners, school nurses, Medicaid children & families & poor adults; and finally to achieve the objectives of the Recovery Act by leveraging the stimulus funds coming to Georgia through partnership and collaboration with the Georgia Department of Community Health who is leading the charge to establish the state health information exchange (HIE), and the National Center for Primary Care at The Morehouse School of Medicine, the grantee for the Georgia HIT Regional Extension Center (HITREC) charged with providing outreach and support to rural physicians in achieving an Electronic Health Record. The 'TeleConnect Georgia for Better Health' Program goals and objectives align with the goals of the Georgia HIE and HITREC to improve
health status through the meaningfully use of electronic health records and the exchange of health information via GPT’s highly secure, private telehealth network. The target area to be served by the TCGBH program is Georgia’s 91 counties of persistent poverty with a total population of 1,848,452 and 403,668 unserved and underserved citizens living below poverty level as shown on the attached GTA BTOP SBA demographics spreadsheet. Of the 403,668 vulnerable citizens in this 91 county region 32.6% or 131,596 of the total population are children living in poverty between the ages of 0 to 17, compared to 26% statewide and 23% nationwide. These 131,596 children living in poverty are enrolled in Medicaid and make up 59.7% of the total Medicaid beneficiaries in this region compared to 49.7% in the U.S. To further establish the need for Broadband & access to care in this region, of the total 331,421 school age children enrolled in K-12, 69% are economically disadvantaged, 5% are Hispanic and 46.6% are black, compared to 32% statewide and 14% nationwide according to 2008 data from Kaisers www.statehealthfacts.org site. Another target group that will benefit from broadband adoption and the TCGBH program is the 1575 total primary care physicians, approximately 6,000 nurses and 700 non-physician practitioners serving these 91 poverty stricken counties, most of which are designated as Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) and Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA) and Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) according to the Georgia Rural Primary Care Plan published by the Georgia Office of Rural Health. The TCGBH program’s integrated community approach seeks to reach an estimated 331,421 school age children and their families as potential subscribers across 91 school districts and school nurse programs, 62 rural hospitals, 47 rural health clinics, 63 Public Health Departments, 24 Community Service Boards and 30 FQHC’s to extend the education and awareness campaigns to promote broadband adoption and ensure improved health outcomes. Through the TeleConnect Georgia for Better Health collaborative partnership of Georgia Partnership for Telehealth, DCH and Morehouse School of Medicine, and other committed partners, 8275 rural healthcare providers will be educated on accessing and sharing electronic health information securely through the GPT Broadband Network to achieve the requirements set forth in the Recovery Act and improve the health status of their patients. As lead applicant on the TCGBH project, Georgia Partnership for Telehealth, Inc. (http://www.gatelehealth.org/) has proven success in establishing and sustaining Georgia’s only statewide Telehealth network. GPT, Inc. was formed in 2007 following the completion of a three year build out and network development plan, funded through the negotiations of Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine for the Anthem and WellPoint Merger resulting in a telehealth initiative funded with $11.5 Million over 3 years. The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth network currently includes 133 statewide access points developed through strategic partnerships with healthcare providers, community anchor institutions, and health plans and has seen clinical utilization climb exponentially over the last 5 years. While in January, 2006 we had a mere 8 encounters, we had 9,973 encounters for 2008 and over 18,000 encounters in 2009 and more than 30,000 encounters are projected in 2010. This BTOP award will fund an additional 64 sites totaling 197 access points on the network and would facilitate an additional 14,400 encounters. Over 85 specialists, representing over 45 specialties, are currently participating in the network. Providing access to specialties via telemedicine has proven to cut costs on travel, work time and provides earlier access to care therefore preventing the large costs of untreated healthcare problems. The current GPT Network, now self-sustaining, was built on successes and lessons learned from other telehealth programs in the nation and by embracing the continually evolving telecommunications and computer industries. The hallmark of the Georgia
Telehealth program is the Open Access Network; built using dedicated T-1 lines leased from regulated telecommunications carriers in the state of Georgia. This reliable network provides high quality bandwidth and creates a highly secure private network. For access to the internet, there is a single highly protected broadband access point at the hub location in Thomasville, Ga. Ten (10) new jobs will be created directly through contracting with industry experts and by hiring 1 Program Director, 1 Assistant Director to report statistical data related to project milestones and goals, 3 additional Telemedicine liaisons to cover 64 new access points, 1 clinical expert to provide oversight and collaboration with program partners and rural providers, 1 HIT/Information Officer to work with partners and providers to provide HIT expertise and technical assistance, and 1 HIT Consultant to manage the 3 new contracted technical field trainers to provide on-site training and BB awareness to physicians and in the communities to encourage the use of broadband services; and the program will provide ten (10) jobs indirectly through additional work generated under the contractual agreements with partners and vendors. Georgia Partnership for Telehealth proposes an overall project budget of $3,679,061.00 for the TeleConnect Georgia for Better Health Program. Of this amount, GTA requests $2,462,975 in BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption funds and will provide $1,216,086 in matching funds representing 32.4% of project costs.