



Accelerating the speed of care

Operating throughout the Lincoln Trail area of Kentucky, Communicare provides access to mental health services to communities in eight counties. To deliver responsive care to all residents and enable faster treatments, Communicare needed a network technology solution that could support telehealth initiatives across their entire coverage area.

COMMUNICARE

Industry

Healthcare

Customer

795 employees in 50 centers

Locations across 8 counties in Kentucky

Specializes in mental health services

Challenges

Stable video conferencing across all clinics

Secure access to electronic medical records

Solutions

MPLS VPN

Managed router

Results

More patients served

Higher network speeds

Greater cost efficiencies

Serving all patients equally

With a mandate to serve patients in even the most remote areas, Communicare's IT team recognized the need to find a more creative and innovative way to extend care. Telehealth consultations between doctors and patients via video conferencing made the most sense.

"We didn't start doing video conferencing until about two years ago, but it's really starting to catch on," states Dale Wilcox, director of information services at Communicare. "Many of the rural areas we serve don't have a lot of doctors. We're able to pull the doctors in and set patients up with video services and support to connect them."

The advantages of a video telehealth model are substantial: video conferencing reduces wait times by enabling doctors to connect remotely. Patients can simply show up at the nearest Communicare clinic and consult with the doctor or clinician via video feed. As a result, Communicare can treat and serve a greater number of patients faster, without the need to hire more medical staff.

Of course, delivering real-time video conferencing requires higher bandwidth. While Communicare had partially upgraded its network to an MPLS solution, roughly half of the clinics in Communicare's network still relied on traditional and T1 lines, supplemented by DSL for Internet access.

To offer all of its remote patients telehealth services equally—as well as support a cloud-based electronic medical record (EMR) system—Communicare needed consistently high bandwidth that could scale to meet peak demands while delivering the resiliency and security required in a healthcare setting. The IT team at Communicare was challenged to develop an affordable solution that could bring all of its sites up to the same level of network access and performance.

Partners in care

With a proven performance record in the healthcare sector, Windstream Enterprise worked with Communicare to develop a high-speed data solution that integrated seamlessly with the company's existing infrastructure—bringing the full network up to a consistently high level of performance and uptime—at a price Communicare could afford.

Windstream Enterprise began the process by working with Communicare to acquire USAC rural broadband funding to help offset the cost. Once funds were in place, Windstream Enterprise set out to upgrade the remaining half of Communicare's network.

At the heart of Communicare's solution is a private, secure network enabled by Windstream Enterprise MPLS VPN, augmented by Windstream Enterprise Managed Routers at key endpoints. The solution delivers carrier-grade data that enables Communicare's IT team to prioritize bandwidth use through QoS, along with the ability to define high-priority traffic—a necessary capability for video conferencing solutions. What's more, the solution is resilient enough to meet the stringent demands for handling EMR traffic.

The best part? The Windstream Enterprise MPLS solution plays well with others. According to Wilcox, "It was important that Windstream Enterprise could work with our other provider and make everything seamless. After some configuration sessions, we were satisfied they could do that." Communicare can take advantage of the expanded coverage Windstream Enterprise offers to reach remote areas while relying on the solution to operate over their other provider's line for last-mile access to their clinics.

In fact, Steve Mosqueda, Communicare's network administrator, found an additional silver lining. "We actually wound up with a better solution in having two providers do it for us because they gave us the ability to incorporate the things that we hadn't initially planned on doing, like failover capabilities and some disaster recovery," says Mosqueda. "We hadn't considered doing it at the same time, but it became available because we had dual providers who gave us the ability to do that on both sides."

Higher expectations, lower costs

While Wilcox and Mosqueda are still finessing the upgraded infrastructure, Communicare is already beginning to see results. The solution's flexible, resilient bandwidth is delivering the speeds Communicare needs to support video telehealth and EMR—even in the most active times of the day. Additionally, it supports 24x7 access to records across all sites.

The Communicare IT team has also seen internal efficiencies from their new solution. "We're managing to be more productive with less now, which has been a really good thing," says Mosqueda. "The upgrade should actually increase our ability to drive more revenue out of our resources by using them smarter."

"From my side," Wilcox adds, "I've definitely had executives come up to me from different areas of the company and comment on improvements in the network, improvements in the speed. And we expect to see that more often in the very near future."

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About Windstream Enterprise

Windstream Enterprise collaborates with businesses across the U.S. to drive digital transformation by delivering solutions that solve today's most complex networking and communication challenges.

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