

New Intermountain Health TeleOncology Partnership Brings Life-Saving Cancer Care to Interior Alaska

Groundbreaking telehealth partnership between Intermountain Health and the Tanana Chiefs Conference brings cancer care to patients in remote Fairbanks, Alaska

SALT LAKE CITY, UT, UNITED STATES, August 20, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Patients in a remote area of Fairbanks, Alaska, now have broader access to greatly needed cancer services due to a groundbreaking telehealth partnership between [Intermountain Health](#) and the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC).



Intermountain Health TeleOncology Partnership

The Telehealth Oncology collaboration brings comprehensive cancer care closer to home for Alaska Native populations across a vast and remote region.

Tanana Chiefs Conference is an Alaska Native non-profit corporation that provides health and social services to more than 20,000 Alaska Natives and American Indians, many of whom live in small, remote villages spread across 235,000 square miles of Interior Alaska—an area nearly the size of Texas.

The TeleOncology partnership with Intermountain Health is designed to reduce travel time and expenses, allowing many patients to remain in their communities during cancer treatment and receive the best possible treatment and comprehensive cancer care.

After initial in-person oncology treatments in Fairbanks, many patients can continue follow-up care remotely, including some lab monitoring and telehealth consultations.

“Our partnership with Intermountain Health has created much needed access and resulted in reduced barriers to care for many Alaska Native patients challenged with cancer and hematologic conditions. Alaska is quite remote, and medical specialties can often be

bottlenecked,” said Angie Lucien, PA-C, and Team Lead for Tanana Chiefs Conference’s Cancer and Infusion Center. “Working with our dedicated Oncologist Dr. Rupard, we have found an accessible, compassionate, culturally competent provider. This program is truly tailored to our patient population’s unique needs, who desire care closer to home.”

Fairbanks serves as a central hub for interior tribal regions, making it an ideal location for this regional care model.

Historically, patients in the Fairbanks region have faced significant barriers to accessing cancer care, often traveling more than 350 miles to Anchorage for treatment. In collaboration with Intermountain Health’s TeleOncology program, patients can receive chemotherapy, infusion therapy, lab work, imaging, and support services locally in Fairbanks.

“Travel was too much for some patients, or it was too cumbersome to figure it all out,” said Kimberlee Rowett, TeleOncology Clinical Manager for Intermountain Health. “Fortunately, our collaboration provides that necessary service for patients. What an honor it is to be a part of that.”

This collaboration will also benefit healthcare workers who have had to travel long distances to provide care.

“For a healthy individual, traveling out to the remote village locations can often be challenging. When we look at our patients going through cancer treatment, our elder patients, finding a way to limit this challenging travel and providing care closer to home is a top priority,” said Kelly McDevitt, Nurse Care Manager of Cancer Care and Infusion Center for Tanana Chiefs Conference. “Our patients are not boarding large commercial airplanes; they are often times getting on small 4- and 6-seater planes and traveling to and from the runways on 4 wheelers and snow machines in the winter.”

The TeleOncology program has provided patients in the area with individualized care and regional support during their cancer journeys.

TeleOncology services are now made accessible to Alaska Native patients in rural communities with further access to pharmacy and oncology services. The program is set up to allow for growth and possible service expansions in the future.

Dr. Erik Rupard is an attending physician of hematology and oncology for Intermountain Health, stationed in Pennsylvania. He helps provide telehealth hematology/oncology consultation and treatment to the Native Alaskan community in Fairbanks.

He and the TCC team work together to provide additional insight and diagnostics to patients.

“It has been wonderful getting to know this great group of patients who have shared their

experiences and their culture with me,” said Dr. Rupard. “Some of these patients would have otherwise had to travel 350+ miles to Anchorage to receive care, and many have expressed their appreciation that these services are available more locally for them. It has been very gratifying.”

“The population we serve has unique needs and Dr. Rupard really works hard to understand our patients and give them the care that they’re needing in that moment, whether it be some sort of emotional support and reassurance, or focusing more toward treatment and what that looks like for each individual. He also serves as a mentor for our developing team, and offers purposeful education to our providers and nursing at every opportunity,” said Lucien.

Dr. Rupard has found that the positive impact of the TCC and Intermountain Health partnership has brought greater resources to patients, and additional support to caregivers as they help more patients.

“In just four months, we’ve diagnosed and treated a dozen cancers or blood disorders, ranging from the benign, like iron deficiency anemia, to the malignant, like stage IV prostate cancer or breast cancer,” Dr. Rupard said. “This partnership is a game-changer for our community.”

While not every patient will be served by Dr. Rupard as the primary oncologist due to community limitations (such as diagnostic and treatment options), this partnership has reduced the burden of travel for a great deal of patients and marks a significant step forward in reducing the burden of cancer.

“I occasionally had patients ask, ‘Hey, is it okay if I do this thing, if I go on this trip, even though I’m on treatment?’ And my answer is always the same. ‘We are doing all this, putting you through all these things, so that you can live your life and enjoy your life and be with your family and take the trips and take part in that event that is so important to you,’” said Dr. Rupard.

Tanana Chiefs Conference is an Alaska Native non-profit corporation that works toward meeting the health and social service needs of the Alaska Native people living within the 235,000 square mile region in Interior Alaska. TCC was formally founded in 1962 and emerged out of the long-standing tradition of Interior tribes working together to advocate for their communities. For more information visit www.tananachiefs.org.

About Intermountain Health

Headquartered in Utah with locations in six states and additional operations across the western U.S., Intermountain Health is a nonprofit system of 33 hospitals, over 400 clinics, medical groups with some 4,600 employed physicians and advanced care providers, a health plans division called Select Health with more than one million members, and other health services. Helping people live the healthiest lives possible, Intermountain is committed to improving community health and is widely recognized as a leader in transforming healthcare by using evidence-based best practices to consistently deliver high-quality outcomes at sustainable costs. For up-to-date

information and announcements, please see the Intermountain Health newsroom at <https://news.intermountainhealth.org/>.

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Claudia Chinn
Intermountain Health
+1 801-442-3217

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