



National Philanthropy Scan Web Series #4: Digital Access and Telehealth: What's working, What are the challenges, and What are the opportunities?



Veneeth Iyengar
Executive Director
ConnectLA, Louisiana

Veneeth is the first executive director for the state of Louisiana's broadband efforts (also known as ConnectLa). He is responsible for coordinating efforts among federal, state and local leaders to eliminate the digital divide in Louisiana by 2029.

He and his team are considered thought leaders in the broadband community for their rapid scale up and execution of federal dollars to impact the 1.5 million residents in Louisiana who lack high speed internet. Louisiana's efforts have been recognized and he is often asked to speak at local and national events by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Brookings Institute, Consumer Electronics Show, National Governors Association, former FCC officials, Fiber Broadband Association, National Conference of State Legislators, the US Department of Commerce's SelectUSA Summit, National Digital Inclusion Alliance and other organizations.

ConnectLa's work has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Politico, Axios, The Advocate, USA Today's network of newspapers and other leading telecom publications. Their office has also been recognized nationally and among other states in the following ways:

- #1 - Received approval from US Treasury for then plan to spend \$176 Million in American Rescue Plan Dollars
- #1 - Recipients of the first dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law-Broadband/National Telecommunications and Information Administration
- #1 - Per a May 6th, 2022 Wall Street Journal Article on adoption of the Affordable Connectivity Program on a per capita basis

The Patterson Foundation created its [Digital Access for All initiative](#) to explore the efforts of multiple sectors working to enhance access to technology that connects people in ways that foster inclusion and well-being. Discovering and exploring the interconnected opportunities and possibilities that individuals, organizations, and communities offer is at the heart of the DA4A initiative.

- #6 - National Digital Inclusion Alliance's Digital Equity Index, which measures how well states

are addressing digital equity

From 2018-2021, he was the Assistant Chief Administrative Officer for East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor-President Sharon Weston-Broome. During, the parish saw the best year in history for economic development projects. He was involved in the lifecycle of Economic Development deals and he led the administration's response in helping small business owners during the pandemic.

Veneeth was asked by Governor John Bel Edwards to co-chair his Resilient Louisiana Healthcare Task Force, which included the CEOs of Ochsner, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana and Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System. The task force recommended approaches to create an innovative healthcare economy given the challenges posed by the pandemic. Prior to his time as a public servant, Veneeth helped build the Venture Capital/Private Equity healthcare practice for Sage Growth Partners and worked in the Office of the Honorable Robert Mosbacher Jr., former CEO of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation under President George W. Bush.

Veneeth received the Johns Hopkins University Woodrow Wilson Distinguished Alumni Award for Public Service in 2022, 2020 Leadership Louisiana Recipient by the Council for a Better Louisiana and 2018 Forty under 40 in Baton Rouge by the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report.

He is on Ochsner's Health State Advisory Board with the focus of significantly improving the healthcare rankings in the state, Board of Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation and Chairman for Innovation Catalyst, a non-profit evergreen investment based in Baton Rouge that has made more than a dozen investments startups.

He received his Master of Science in finance from Johns Hopkins University and his Bachelor of Science in economics from Purdue University. Veneeth grew up in Baton Rouge and attended Baton Rouge High School.

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Michael Tipton

CEO

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of
Louisiana Foundation

Fifteen years ago, Michael Tipton was teaching high school history in the South Bronx, an experience that cemented his commitment to making the world better for the next generation. Since returning home to Louisiana in 2007, Michael has lived that commitment by leading growth and change for some of the state's leading organizations in education and health. As the executive director for Teach for America in South Louisiana, he led a team that grew fundraising from \$650,000 to more than \$3.7 million and graduated over 400 alumni, many of whom are now serving as non-profit and policy leaders.

In 2015, Michael joined the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation as its president, where he manages a \$50 million endowment and grantmaking programs to improve the wellness and wellbeing of children and communities across Louisiana. Michael is also the head of Community Relations for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana, where he oversees corporate giving of more than \$1 million annually and supports volunteer efforts for the company's 2,500 Louisiana-based employees.

During Michael's tenure, employee-led community impact has grown and diversified substantially. As two examples, in 2020 Blue Cross employees gave more than 45,000+ hours of community service and for this was named the United States' Volunteer Leader. In 2020 & 2021 Blue Cross launched a new state-wide platform with the Taproot Foundation allowing volunteers to leverage skills in support of non-profit projects. This was a first-of-its-kind effort and one that is now being replicated elsewhere in the United States.

For these and other efforts Blue Cross has been named the Corporate Volunteer Champion (2017, Volunteer Louisiana), been given the Torch Award for Ethics in Business (2018, Better Business Bureau), has been named to the Points of Light Foundation's Civic 50 Award, highlighting the most community-minded businesses in the United States, for the last 4 years

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Blue Cross and the Foundation have also launched numerous high-impact projects and programs during Michael's tenure, including the launch of Blue Bikes New Orleans, grants to enable Ruston to become Louisiana first walkable city and collaborative efforts like the Louisiana Health Fellows and the Louisiana Funder Collaboration to share ideas and best practices. Most recently the Foundation launched a \$15M Disaster Relief Grant Fund, supporting both COVID-19 and Hurricane related response throughout 2020 & 2021. These investments make the Blue Cross Foundation the top, Louisiana-based grant maker in response and recovery over the last two years.

Tipton is a native of Louisiana and graduate of LSU with dual degrees in political science and history. He earned his master's degree in teaching from Pace University in New York and is the recipient of numerous community honors, including being named as LSU's Young Alumnus of the Year. He is an alum Leadership Baton Rouge and Leadership Louisiana and serves on the boards of the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) and Philanthropy Southeast among others. Michael and his wife Sarah have two children, Alexander and Eleanor.

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Hannah Wesolowski
Chief Advocacy Officer
NAMI USA

Hannah and the entire Government Relations, Policy & Advocacy team work with advocates, partners and NAMI leaders to enact policy change that will improve the lives of all people affected by mental health conditions. She believes in the power of advocates sharing their stories to advance research, increase mental health funding, improve access to care, expand social supports and decriminalize mental illness.

She came to NAMI in 2017 with more than a decade of experience in advocacy, joining the NAMI team after five years at the Public Affairs Council to help associations, corporations and nonprofit advocacy groups build government affairs efforts programs. She previously led political advocacy efforts at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the American Institute of Architects.

Hannah grew up in New Hampshire and has a B.A. from New York University, where she also earned an MPA from NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

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