

# Providing Cost-Effective Emergency and Multi-Specialty Services to Improve Patient Care in the Rural Northwest

Case in Point: Saint Alphonsus Health System



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## Saint Alphonsus Health System

Saint Alphonsus Health System is a four-hospital, regional, faith-based Catholic ministry with over 4,300 associates and a 950+ medical staff, that serves 700,000 people in Idaho and Oregon.

With a promise to keep care close to home for patients, Saint Alphonsus Health System is comprised of medical centers in Boise and Nampa, Idaho, and Ontario and Baker City, Oregon. Additionally, Saint Alphonsus operates two stand-alone emergency departments located in Eagle and Nampa, Idaho.



Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise Idaho, is a tertiary facility that has a vast service area spanning large sections of rural Idaho and Oregon. This area extends more than 200 miles east/west and more than 400 miles north/south.

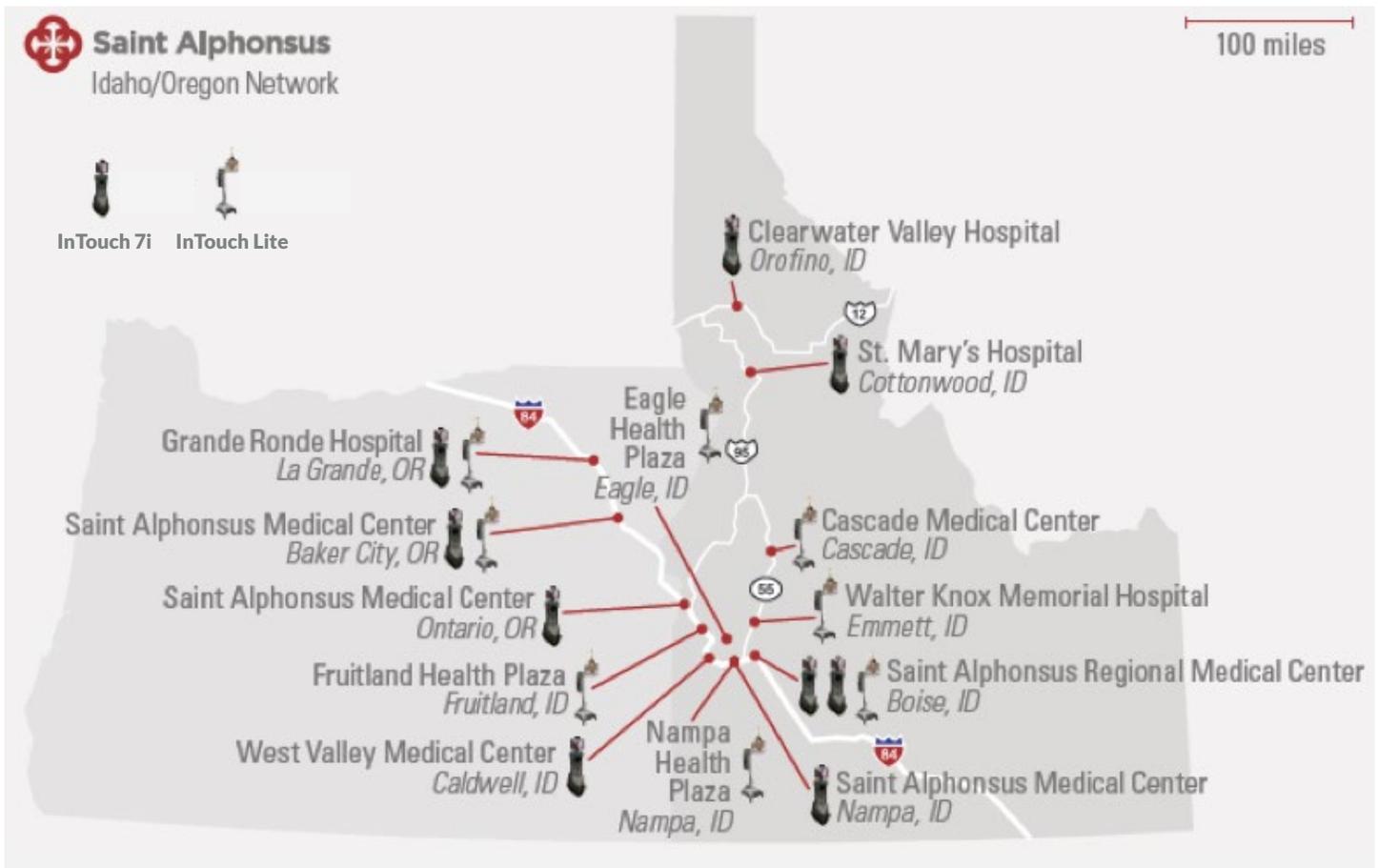
## The Challenge

Saint Alphonsus Health System is anchored by the only Level II Trauma Center in the region, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise. The center provides the most experienced care to the most critically ill patients in cardiovascular, neuroscience, oncology, orthopedics, trauma and emergency, and women's and children's care.

Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center has a vast service area, spanning large sections of rural Idaho and Oregon, extending more than 200 miles east/west and more than 400 miles north/south. Most of the counties served are designated as either rural or frontier, with an average uninsured rate of 23%—significantly higher than the 15% national average—and an average poverty rate of 16%—slightly higher than the national rate of 15%.

Saint Alphonsus' primary challenge was to provide emergency services, in addition to a broader range of sub-specialty services, to which these communities had little access. Specific objectives included:

1. Reducing the number of miles patients needed to travel to see specialists
2. Lowering medical transport costs by reducing unnecessary transfers
3. Providing faster response time for strokes, burns, and other time-critical emergencies
4. Implementing cost-effective emergency and outreach education programs to affiliated hospitals



## The Solution

Saint Alphonius Regional Medical Center first analyzed the needs of the affiliated hospitals and identified clinical services that would benefit from increased access to specialists. In 2006, they launched the Idaho/Oregon Telehealth Network with the introduction of an operating room distance learning program, followed by telestroke services.

As Saint Alphonius began providing these services using telehealth, they continued to meet with member hospitals to discuss collaboration within the network, increasing the number of specialty services provided. The network grew quickly, thanks to grant funding and the active involvement of the Saint Alphonius Emergency Department, which helped provide greater access to board-certified emergency physicians. The result was an integrated and comprehensive system of bi-directional care providing shared clinical services across thirteen hospitals.

“Saint Alphonius first partnered with providers who readily accepted InTouch technology so that success could be demonstrated to others.”

—Tiffany Whitmore

Saint Alphonius Director of System Planning and Telemedicine



“There’s been a dramatic increase in the number of stroke patients identified as t-PA candidates that are now receiving care in their own communities, which saves lives and ultimately improves the overall quality of life for stroke victims.”

—Nichole Whitener, MSN, CNRN, NE-BC

Saint Alphonsus Health System Director Neuroscience Services

## The Results

Since its introduction, the Idaho/Oregon Telehealth Network has greatly expanded the scope of services available in both acute and non-acute care services. The number of telehealth encounters rose from approximately 500 in 2008, to more than 2,000 in 2012. Many outpatient services are now offered locally, including cardiology and adult psychiatry.

Patients in rural or frontier towns now have access to high-quality emergency consultations for stroke, cardiovascular, and burn services in conjunction with the University of Utah’s Burn Center, which began a pilot teleburn project with Saint Alphonsus in 2004 and is now providing both emergency consultations and follow-up treatments to healthcare providers throughout the Intermountain West.

Historically, the vast majority of stroke patients would have required transport to Boise before receiving t-PA, which delayed treatment beyond the appropriate time window. The telestroke program’s timely intervention and coordination of stroke education identified more patients in the network as candidates earlier in the course of care to receive t-PA treatment. With telehealth, providers have access to specialty services and patients can now be treated in their own communities, receiving the time-sensitive care required for treating stroke.

The financial results have been equally impressive. The network’s emergency consults saved an estimated \$844,000 on patient transport over a three-year period (2009-2012). The teleburn program alone saved approximately \$535,000 during 2012. The network also benefits patients, who have eliminated nearly 1.4 million miles of travel, saving close to \$700,000 in out-of-pocket expenses.

“We’re now bringing many specialty services to frontier communities that previously had no access to them.”

—Kimberly Gallagher  
Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center  
Project Lead, Telemedicine Department



Using telehealth to provide access to appropriate services also reduces costs. For example, the telepsychiatry program has seen decreased utilization of the emergency room by psychiatric patients once they gain access to outpatient services.

Empowered by the new, clinically-focused telehealth solution, hospitals in rural settings can now be a source for services similar to the telerheumatology program that originated at Saint Alphonsus, Baker City.

The network also makes it cost-effective to offer a wide array of distance learning programs by using traditional video conferencing. Medical staff in small communities can now take part in emergency department grand rounds, gaining important knowledge in areas such as hemostatic resuscitation, catastrophic brain trauma and best practices for bedside ultrasound. The network also offers regularly scheduled courses on stroke education and other vital topics.

The Saint Alphonsus Idaho/Oregon Telehealth Network is a showcase for how to provide not only the finest emergency care, but a wide range of multi-specialty services even in rural or frontier settings. For more information about Saint Alphonsus please visit [www.saintalphonsus.org](http://www.saintalphonsus.org).

## About InTouch Health

InTouch Health provides technology-enabled services to healthcare organizations for the delivery of high-quality virtual care, anytime, anywhere.

InTouch Health solutions are designed to help healthcare system customers execute their telehealth strategies. The cloud-based InTouch TeleHealth Network enables the deployment of telehealth applications anywhere, while providing users: 1) unmatched ease of use and diagnostic capabilities, 2) high reliability, 3) FDA and HIPAA compliance, 4) reconfigurable and secure access control, and 5) clinical and technical reporting.

A successful telehealth program depends on clinician adoption and use. InTouch Health’s Provider Access Software is simple and intuitive, and the Network enables clinicians to make and keep a connection the first time.

InTouch has a number of clinically designed patient access devices that are FDA cleared to support acute care applications and are in use in over 1,100 hospitals. InTouch also has patient access software for use with consumer devices such as laptops and tablets.

[www.InTouchHealth.com](http://www.InTouchHealth.com) | 805.562.8686

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