



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC ADOPTS PILOT PROGRAM UNDER RURAL HEALTH CARE MECHANISM

Pilot will Enhance Access Health Care Providers' Access to Advanced Telecommunications and Information Services

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted an Order that establishes a pilot program to help public and non-profit health care providers build state and region-wide broadband networks dedicated to the provision of health care services, and connect those networks to Internet2, a dedicated nationwide backbone. The construction of such networks will bring the benefits of innovative telehealth, and particularly, telemedicine services to those areas of the country where the need for those benefits is most acute.

Broadband communications is enabling health care providers to vastly improve access to quality medical services. This is particularly true in underserved areas of the country that lack access to the breadth of medical expertise and advanced medical technologies available in other areas. Among other things, telehealth applications, including telemedicine, allow patients to access critically needed medical specialists in a variety of practices, including cardiology, pediatrics, and radiology, without leaving their homes or communities. Use of these technologies can reduce hospital stays and the costs of medical care, as well as facilitate transmission of emergency medical records among doctors and health care facilities.

Despite the Commission's efforts to make it more viable and reflect technological changes, the existing Rural Health Care funding mechanism remains underutilized. The pilot program adopted today will work within the parameters of the existing program to explore ways in which the Rural Health Care funding mechanism can best be used to further the goal of Congress and our rules to enhance public and non-profit health care providers' access to advanced telecommunications and information services. Moreover, the pilot program will provide the Commission useful information as to the feasibility of revising the Commission's current rural health care rules in a manner that best achieves the objectives set forth by Congress.

The pilot program is designed to encourage health care providers to join together to aggregate their needs and develop a strategy for creating statewide and/or regional networks that

will connect numerous health care providers, including rural health care providers, through a dedicated, broadband network. The pilot program will fund up to 85% of the costs incurred to deploy state or regional broadband networks dedicated to health care. The pilot program will also fund up to 85% of the costs of connecting the regional and/or statewide to Internet2, a dedicated nationwide backbone that connects a number of government research institutions, as well as academic, public, and private health care institutions that are repositories of medical expertise and information.

The funding amount will be capped at an amount not to exceed the difference between the amount of monies committed under the existing program for the current year and \$100 million (25% of the annual \$400 million cap on rural health care spending). Interested parties should submit their applications to the Commission 30 days after Office of Management and Budget approval of the information collection requirements in the Order.

Action by the Commission, September 26, 2006, by Order, (FCC 06-144).
Chairman Martin, Commissioners Copps, Adelstein, Tate, and McDowell. Separate statements issued by Chairman Martin, Commissioners Copps, Adelstein, Tate, and McDowell.

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