



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC UPDATE ON RURAL HEALTHCARE PILOT PROGRAM INITIATIVE **Six Telehealth Projects Approved for \$46 million in Universal Service Funds**

Washington D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission today announced the approval of funding under its Rural Health Care Pilot Program (RHCPP) for the build-out of five broadband telehealth networks that will link hundreds of hospitals regionally in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In addition, funding has been approved for the design of a telehealth project in Alaska. Collectively, these projects are eligible to receive \$46 million in reimbursement for the engineering and construction of their regional telehealth networks. Funding commitments for these projects were issued by the Universal Service Administrative Company, or USAC, which administers the RHCPP for the FCC.

“I am pleased with the progress that these rural health care initiatives are making to develop telemedicine programs, build highways for electronic medical records and, overall, increase patient access to health care in the regions they serve,” Acting Chairman Michael J. Copps said. “There is great potential to improve health care for those communities that currently have limited access to primary, specialty and preventive care; as well as to enhance public safety by connecting health care providers, public health officials and first responders to these networks so that they can share crucial data during emergencies. These projects are to be commended for their dedication and commitment to these important goals. I commend USAC for its efforts to ensure the success of the program, and look forward to more such funding approvals soon so we can realize the great promise of this pilot program.”

The FCC established the \$417 million RHCPP to increase patient access to care via telemedicine and support the transfer of electronic medical records, which will improve the quality of care for patients. Nationwide, 67 projects are eligible to receive RHCPP funding for telehealth networks serving 6,000 health care facilities in 42 states and three U.S. territories, using broadband technology to bring state-of-the-art medical practices to isolated rural communities. At this time, 29 of these projects have developed or posted requests for proposals to select vendors to build out their broadband networks, while the remaining projects are preparing their requests for proposals as part of the competitive bidding process.

The following is an update on specific RHCPP projects:

Network Construction

- **Health Information Exchange of Montana (\$13.6 million)** – In an area with no connections to Internet2 or National Lambda Rail - nationwide dedicated Internet backbones - a new fiber network will connect health care providers in Montana to enable distance consultation, electronic record keeping and exchange, disaster readiness, clinical research, and distance education services.
- **Palmetto State Providers Network (\$7.9 million)** – This project will connect health care providers to a fiber optic backbone to enhance simulation training, remote intensive care unit monitoring, and medical education programs across South Carolina.
- **Iowa Health System (\$7.8 million)** – This project will use new network connections to link health care providers in Iowa to an existing statewide, dedicated, broadband healthcare network, Internet2, and National LambdaRail.
- **Heartland Unified Broadband Network (\$4.7 million)** – This project is expanding and enhancing an existing network to increase the use and quality of teleradiology and increase distance education activities throughout Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.
- **Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (\$1.6 million)** – This project has augmented an existing shared electronic health records project that will provide health care providers in Wisconsin with access to redundant connectivity and data centers, as well as higher speeds that will range from 10 to 100 Mbps.

Network Design

- **Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (\$10.4 million)** – The consortium’s network, which will serve primarily rural health care practitioners, will unify and increase the capacity of disparate healthcare networks throughout Alaska, allowing them to connect with urban health centers and access services in the lower 48 states.

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