

# Wireless Healthcare

## **FCC To Fund Telehealth In Rural Areas**

November 29, 2007

To significantly increase access to acute, primary and preventive health care in rural America, the Federal Communications Commission today dedicated over \$417 million for the construction of 69 statewide or regional broadband telehealth networks in 42 states and three U.S. territories under the Rural Health Care Pilot Program (RHCPP).

Broadband deployment is one of the Commission's top priorities – particularly in rural America. And nowhere is the need for broadband greater than in rural healthcare, where isolated clinics can save lives by using advanced communications technology to tap the expertise of modern urban medical centers.

The Commission's RHCPP will support the connection of more than 6,000 public and non-profit health care providers nationwide to broadband telehealth networks. The health care facilities participating in the Pilot Program include: hospitals, clinics, universities and research centers, behavioral health sites, correctional facility clinics, and community health centers.

Telehealth and telemedicine services provide patients in rural areas with access to critically needed medical specialists in a variety of practices, including cardiology, pediatrics, and radiology, in some instances without leaving their homes or communities. Intensive care doctors and nurses can monitor critically-ill patients around the clock and video conferencing allows specialists and mental health professionals to care for patients in different rural locations, often hundreds of miles away.

The networks will deliver services efficiently, reduce costs and travel time for consumers, decrease medical errors, and enable health care providers to share critical information. Rapid and coordinated responses to public health emergencies, such as bioterrorism attacks, pandemics or disease-related outbreaks, will be expedited through coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other public health officials during public health emergencies.

In addition, participants are required to implement, where feasible, health information technology standards as set forth by HHS. This will help advance the President's goal of creating a national system to support patients' electronic health records.

Participants are eligible for universal service funding to support up to 85 percent of the costs associated with the design, engineering and construction of their broadband health care networks. The Pilot Program's requirements complement HHS' nationwide information technology initiatives that support the creation of a nationwide interoperable health information technology infrastructure to improve the quality of health care. These networks may connect to the public Internet or to one of the nation's dedicated Internet backbones: Internet2 or National LambdaRail.

In order to ensure quality and efficiency, all projects must be competitively bid, and are subject to quarterly reviews, and stringent oversight and audits.