



Area Hospitals To Interconnect With New Technologies

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By Peter Neumann
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Adams Hospital in Decatur, Blackford Community Hospital in Hartford City, Jay County Hospital in Portland and Wabash County Hospital are among 35 rural hospitals statewide that will be linked with new technology, thanks to a \$16-million dollar grant to Indiana's Telehealth Network.

(From state press release, Indiana Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman's Office)

Indiana Lt. Governor Becky Skillman and the Indiana Rural Health Association (IRHA) today announced a \$16,138,270 award to the Indiana Telehealth Network by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Indiana Health Network will use the funds to connect the 35 Critical Access Hospitals throughout the state.

"Indiana's access to technology plays an important role in improving healthcare in our rural communities," said Lt. Governor Skillman. "Many clinics in our small cities are without access to broadband networks. They will greatly benefit from this advanced technology, which will allow them to connect with additional medical experts from around the country."

Co-applicants for the award include St. Vincent Health System, Clarian Health Partners, Union Hospital's Richard G. Lugar Center for Rural Health, Bloomington Hospital/E-Health Collaborative, and Indiana Telecommunications Association.

The program will address unmet health needs by providing rural patients with improved access to care. It will provide a venue that will support health information exchange and increased participation of health care providers through the implementation of a dedicated, broadband health network.

The network will deliver services efficiently, reduce costs and travel time for consumers, decrease medical errors, and enable health care providers to share critical information. It will also serve as a resource for public health emergencies and disaster preparedness.

Indiana is now positioned to take a monumental step forward in improving the rural broadband infrastructure and telehealth capacity.

Shawna Girgis, retired Executive Director of the IRHA and current Mayor of Bedford, attributes the success of Indiana's FCC award application to many factors, including the co-applicant organizations that worked to develop the application, the initiative of Senator David Ford and Representative Peggy Welch to author and support the bill that leveraged the required matching funds, as well as the guidance and support provided by Governor Daniels' office.

"Although more than 80 applications were received by the FCC, approximately one-half of projects were funded, which is a testament to the ability of Indiana to accomplish great things when we work together for the greater good of our state and our rural communities. It was a privilege and an honor to work with this team of individuals, and I look forward to seeing this project move forward under the leadership of Don Kelso, IRHA's new Executive Director, with the support from the Office of Community and Rural Affairs and the many other state partners that have been identified," said Girgis.

Carole Kacius, IRHA President, commented that thousands of rural Hoosiers will benefit from this infrastructure upgrade through improved access to health care services, collaboration across health care disciplines, and support of health information exchange initiatives.

Don Kelso, Executive Director of the Indiana Rural Health Association, said the Indiana Rural Health Association and its Indiana Telehealth Network partners look forward to working with hospitals and rural health clinics around Indiana to help ensure better access to quality health care and health information that haven't been readily available.

"A secondary benefit of bringing fiber optics to rural Indiana will be the increased potential of heightened economic development as the health care entities in each community make this fiber connectivity available to their communities," said Kelso. "As companies from various industries look to Indiana to start new ventures, the availability of a high-speed internet connection should pay dividends for the entire community."

The FCC funds are part of \$417 million dedicated 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).

The complete list of hospitals:

Adams Hospital - Decatur
Bedford Regional Medical Center - Bedford
Blackford Community Hospital - Hartford City
Bloomington Hospital of Orange County - Paoli
Bremen, Community Hospital of - Bremen
Cameron Memorial Community Hospital - Angola
Decatur County Hospital - Greensburg
Dukes Memorial Hospital - Peru
Dunn Memorial - Bedford

Gibson General Hospital, Inc. - Princeton
Greene County General Hospital - Linton
Harrison County Hospital - Corydon
Jasper County Hospital - Rensselaer
Jay County Hospital - Portland
LaGrange Community Hospital (Parkview) - LaGrange
Margaret Mary's Community Hospital - Batesville
Perry County Memorial Hospital - Tell City
Pulaski Memorial Hospital - Winamac
Putnam County Hospital - Greencastle
Rush Memorial Hospital - Rushville
Scott County Memorial - Scottsburg
St. Mary's Warrick Hospital - Boonville
St. Vincent Clay Hospital - Brazil
St. Vincent Frankfort Hospital - Frankfort
St. Vincent Jennings Hospital - North Vernon
St. Vincent Mercy Hospital - Elwood
St. Vincent Randolph Hospital - Winchester
St. Vincent Williamsport Hospital - Williamsport
Sullivan County Community Hospital - Sullivan
Tipton County Memorial Hospital - Tipton
Wabash County Hospital - Wabash
Washington County Memorial Hospital - Salem
West Central Community Hospital - Clinton
White County Memorial Hospital - Monticello
Woodlawn Hospital - Rochester