



NEWS

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

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FCC REPORT: BROADBAND HEALTH CARE NETWORKS IMPROVE QUALITY OF CARE FOR RURAL AMERICANS, REDUCE COSTS AND HELP SAVE LIVES

Washington, D.C. – Broadband health care networks improve the quality and reduce the cost of delivering care in rural areas, according to a Federal Communications Commission staff report evaluating the Commission’s Rural Health Care Pilot Program.

The FCC staff report at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-12-1332A1.pdf details the benefits of the Pilot program, as well as the lessons learned from the Pilot, which supports 50 active projects in 38 states. The five largest projects are statewide networks in California, Colorado, Oregon, South Carolina and West Virginia, which are on target to connect over 800 health care providers.

Broadband networks of rural and urban providers save lives by providing rural Americans with instant access to specialized services that are not available in rural areas, saving time that is critical in stroke care and other emergencies. High-speed broadband networks capable of supporting telemedicine and telehealth applications also provide rural patients access to more routine telehealth consultations with medical specialists, efficiently transit health records, and facilitate training of nurses and doctors.

But rural health care providers operate on thin margins, and may not be able to afford broadband communications without assistance from the FCC’s Rural Health Care program, the report says. The FCC launched the Pilot in 2006 to explore how best to help rural health care providers harness the power of broadband to improve care. A map at <http://www.fcc.gov/maps/rural-health-care-pilot-program> shows the location of the pilot projects and of the health care providers participating in each project.

The experiences of those pilot projects are providing critical information to the FCC as it considers comprehensive reform of its Rural Health Care program. Some examples of benefits from the Pilot-funded networks include:

- Physicians in Bacon County, Georgia saved the life of a young stroke victim by using a telemedicine connection to a specialist in Savannah in order to administer clot-busting medication
- Remote psychiatric consultations for patients in rural South Carolina hospitals that lack staff psychiatrists speeds treatment and save days of waiting in expensive emergency rooms
- Hospitals in South Dakota’s Heartland Unified Broadband Network have saved \$1.2 million in expenses through electronic intensive care unit services, which reduce the number of days patients spend in ICU and the number of transfers to other hospitals

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