

USDA Announces \$1.7 Million in Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants Across Wisconsin

Written by USDA

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STEVENS POINT, WI - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Wednesday that USDA is investing \$23.4 million in 75 projects across 31 states and the Western Pacific to expand distance learning and telemedicine opportunities in rural areas.

“Rural communities often lack access to specialized medical care or advanced educational opportunities necessary for stronger rural economies,” Vilsack said, noting that today is National Rural Health Day. “These grants will help increase access to health care and many other essential services.”

The grants are being provided through USDA Rural Development’s Distance Learning and Telemedicine program. They may be used to purchase equipment to provide educational and telemedicine services to rural communities.

In Wisconsin, six educational and health organizations received a total of \$1,719,686 as a part of the announcement.

The awards were announced on National Rural Health Day to highlight work underway in the private sector, academia and in state and federal rural health offices to address the unique health care needs of rural communities.

Receiving grant funds in Wisconsin include:

- Bellin Memorial Hospital, Inc. – Green Bay, WI – \$145,029 will be used to establish a telehealth network that connects Bellin Memorial Hospital in Green Bay, Wisconsin and Bellin Health Oconto Hospital in Oconto, Wisconsin with four remote Bellin Health clinics in northeast Wisconsin and one Bellin Health clinic that serves the rural community of Daggett, Michigan.

- Cooperative Educational Service Agency 10 – Chippewa, WI – \$294,609 will help to replace video conferencing equipment in 10 Wisconsin schools and provide equipment in three Native Alaskan schools, providing a unique cultural exchange program between schools in

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Alaska and Wisconsin, the Access Creates Excellent Success (ACES) project.

- Cooperative Educational Service Agency 11 – Turtle Lake, WI – \$97,140 will be used to upgrade outdated distance learning video equipment in six rural high schools within the rural communities of Clayton, Frederic, Luck, Pepin, Plum City, and St. Croix Falls, Wis.
- Shawano Medical Center, Inc. – Shawano, WI – \$379,515 to provide telehealth services to 12 health care facilities and education centers.
- Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College – Shell Lake, WI – \$485,524 will help to purchase video conferencing equipment for two hub sites and 21 hub/end-user sites including one Native American site, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College
- Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College – Shell Lake, WI – \$317,869 will be used to upgrade distance learning video equipment in 15 rural high schools in southwestern Wisconsin

Funding of each award announced today is contingent upon the recipient meeting the terms of the grant agreement.

Since 2009, USDA has provided more than \$213 million in loans and grants for 634 distance learning and telemedicine projects in rural areas nationwide.

USDA Rural Development's funding continues to have a dramatic impact on rural communities across Wisconsin. Since 2010, USDA Rural Development has invested more than \$3.5 billion on essential public facilities, small and emerging businesses, water and sewer systems, and housing opportunities in rural Wisconsin communities.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As the lead federal agency for rural development needs, USDA Rural Development can help rural communities and regions grow and prosper by offering a variety of financial and technical assistance programs that encourage the development of strong community and economic development strategies.

During this past year, USDA Rural Development's \$571 million investment in Wisconsin helped create or retain nearly 1,380 jobs, aided 3,600 families in buying their own homes and assisted

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more than 50 communities as they made improvements to their facilities, services and infrastructure.

Further information on USDA Rural Development is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting the web site at www.rd.usda.gov/wi .

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender. Kelly Edwards of USDA provided this story.