



The FCC's Universal Service Rural Health Care Program

The FCC's Rural Health Care Program includes: the Healthcare Connect Fund Program and the Telecommunications Program. In 1996, Congress mandated that the FCC use the Universal Service Fund (USF) to provide support for both telecommunications and advanced telecommunications and information services for eligible health care providers (HCPs). HCPs use these services to provide telemedicine, transmit health records, and conduct other telehealth activities, thereby improving patient care and reducing health care costs. Here are some frequently asked questions about the FCC's Rural Health Care Program.

What Are the Main Features of the Rural Health Care Program?

- The Healthcare Connect Fund Program (HCF), created in 2012, supports high-capacity broadband connectivity and broadband networks for eligible HCPs with a 65 percent discount on the cost of advanced telecommunications and information services and equipment used for health care purposes.
- The Telecommunications Program, created in 1997, ensures that eligible rural HCPs pay no more than their urban counterparts for telecommunications services used for health care purposes. The Telecommunications Program supports the difference between urban and rural rates for telecommunications services for eligible rural HCPs.

Which Health Care Providers Are Eligible to Participate in the Rural Health Care Program?

The Rural Health Care Program provides support to eligible public/non-profit HCPs. Eligible HCPs include any:

- Post-secondary educational institution offering health care instruction, including a teaching hospital or medical school;
- Community health center or health center providing health care to migrants;
- Local health department or agency;
- Community mental health center;
- Not-for-profit hospital;
- Rural health clinic;
- Skilled nursing facility; or a
- Consortium of health care providers consisting of one or more entities described above.

The HCF also provides support to consortia of rural and non-rural public/non-profit HCPs. Non-rural HCPs are eligible for support only if they are members of a majority-rural consortium in the HCF Program.

How Does the Rural Health Care Program Work?

An eligible HCP identifies an eligible service that it needs for health care purposes. It then requests bids for the desired services by submitting a competitive bidding form to the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) for posting on its website. HCPs must wait 28 days from the posting of the competitive bidding form on USAC's website to select a vendor. After reviewing the bids it receives, the HCP selects the vendor(s) with the most cost-effective service offering and applies to USAC for approval of funding for the desired purchases.



If the application for funding is approved, USAC will issue a funding commitment to the HCP. After the selected vendor provides the approved services, an invoice is submitted to USAC for disbursement of the approved funds.

Approval of Rural Health Care Program funding is conditioned on compliance with the FCC's rules, as well as state and local procurement requirements.

What Is the Budget for the Rural Health Care Program?

Support for the Rural Health Care Program is capped at \$571 million per funding year and is adjusted annually for inflation. The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau announces inflation increases to the funding cap for a particular funding year, if any, by issuing a Public Notice.

Can I Find Out How Health Care Providers in My Area Are Benefiting from the Rural Health Care Program?

Yes. You can visit USAC's website at <https://opendata.usac.org/browse?category=Rural+Health+Care&limitTo=datasets> to determine Rural Health Care Program funding specific to your state.

For More Information

For information on the FCC's other universal service programs, visit fcc.gov/guides/universal-service-support-mechanisms.

For more information on other consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at fcc.gov/consumers.

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