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NEWS RELEASE: USDA Invests \$1.6 Million in Distance Learning and Telemedicine Infrastructure to Improve Healthcare Access in Missouri

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USDA Invests \$1.6 Million in Distance Learning and Telemedicine Infrastructure to Improve Healthcare Access in Missouri

Investment Will Benefit Nearly 133,000 Rural Missourians

COLUMBIA, MO, Feb. 25, 2021 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Missouri Acting State Director D Clark Thomas announced the agency is investing \$1,621,242 to help rural Missourians gain access to healthcare. Rural areas are seeing higher infection and death rates related to COVID-19 due to several factors, including a much higher percentage of underlying conditions, difficulty accessing medical care, and lack of health insurance. This includes \$718,613 provided through the [CARES Act](#).

“These projects will allow three Missouri entities to establish or expand telemedicine networks that will ultimately improve rural Missourians’ access to much-needed, close to home, quality healthcare,” said Acting State Director Thomas. “These investments by the Biden administration are a prime example of Rural Development’s mission—improving the quality of life for rural Americans.”

USDA is funding projects through the [Distance Learning and Telemedicine](#) (DLT) grant program. The program helps rural education and health care entities remotely reach students, patients and outside expertise. These capabilities make world-class education and health care opportunities accessible in rural communities. The ability to use telehealth resources is critical, especially now during a global pandemic.

In Missouri:

- **Heartland Regional Medical Center** will use a \$902,629 grant to expand its telemedicine capabilities in Buchanan, Gentry and Nodaway counties. The telemedicine services will help physicians and crisis responders to spend less time traveling to rural communities and more time treating patients. Rural residents will gain access to virtual hospital services, electronic intensive care units, and access to more than 70 categories of specialty care from more than 200 specialists. Behavioral health services, including emergency assessments and substance use treatment, also will be expanded through telehealth visits in partnership with a behavioral health provider in St. Joseph.
- **SSM Health Care St. Louis** is receiving a \$665,000 grant to establish a telemedicine network linking SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital with six rural clinics in Butler, Dunklin, Mississippi, New Madrid and Reynolds counties. The project will place telemedicine units and ultrasound technology at end-user sites with secure access to telemedicine control stations at the hub. The network will provide obstetrics and neonatal services and will expand the availability of medical care in the region. SSM Health St. Louis anticipates that this TeleTouch Pregnancy Connection project will improve birth outcomes and long-term wellness for more than 1,480 pregnant women.
- **Resolute Nursing Solutions LLC** will use a \$53,613 grant to establish an end-user site for telemedicine in Pemiscot County in southeast Missouri. The telemedicine system will connect rural residents with medical practitioners using two-way video technology, specialized equipment and digital monitoring devices. This network will help decrease costs for residents to access health care services.

Today’s announcement came as part of a larger statement in which Agriculture Secretary

Today's announcement came as part of a larger statement in which Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced USDA is [investing \\$42.3 million to help rural residents gain access to health care and educational opportunities](#).

In January, President Biden requested all parts of the federal government to contribute resources to contain the coronavirus pandemic. USDA is responding to the President's call to action. To date, more than 350 USDA personnel have deployed to assist with standing up vaccination sites, for example. In addition to personnel, USDA is offering its facilities, cold chain infrastructure, public health experts, disaster response specialists, and footprint in rural and Tribal communities across the country. USDA's commitment to control the pandemic extends to our own staff and facilities, with masking and physical distancing requirements across USDA, a commitment to provide PPE to our front-line workers, and working with states to prioritize vaccinations for our workforce. For more information, visit www.usda.gov/coronavirus.

USDA Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities and create jobs in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas.

Contact USDA Rural Development

Information on programs available through USDA Rural Development is available by visiting www.rd.usda.gov/mo, by calling (573) 876-0976, or by emailing RDMissouri@usda.gov.

USDA Rural Development has 25 offices across the state to serve the 2.2 million residents living in rural Missouri. Office locations include a state office in Columbia, along with local offices in Butler, Charleston, Chillicothe, Clinton, Dexter, Eldon, Farmington, Higginsville, Houston, Kennett, Kirksville, Maryville, Mexico, Moberly, Neosho, New London, Poplar Bluff, Richmond, Rolla, Sedalia, Springfield, St. Joseph, Troy, and West Plains.

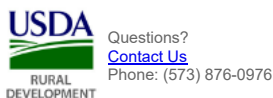
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