



For Immediate Release:
November 1, 2017

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Coalition of Health Providers and Telehealth Networks Urge Congress to Reform the Rural Health Care Program

Washington, DC (November 1, 2017) - The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition along with 35 health care providers and telehealth networks from across the country sent a letter to Congressional leaders today asking them to support an increase in funding for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Rural Health Care (RHC) program.

The RHC program is currently facing an unprecedented crisis. Applications for funding [exceeded the funding cap](#) for both FY 2016 and FY 2017. This shortage has resulted in health providers canceling or downgrading broadband connections and reducing services to the public. Several telehealth networks put their plans to expand into rural markets on hold due to the uncertainty around future funding.

"This is a life and death issue for Rural America," said **John Windhausen, Executive Director of the SHLB Coalition**. "Rural communities that encounter a severe shortage of doctors, aging populations, and a greater distance to medical experts are in dire need of easily accessible telemedicine services. The RHC program has the power to elevate the health of these communities, but only if the program is revamped to promote rural broadband."

The RHC program is the only Universal Service Fund program that has not been reformed, and it is long overdue. The current \$400 million per year cap was set by the FCC twenty years ago. The cap has not been adjusted either for inflation or to reflect massive changes in the healthcare and broadband marketplaces that have occurred since 1997.

Increasing the RHC funding cap from \$400M to \$800M per year would have a huge impact on the availability of affordable broadband services for rural health providers and will have only a minimal impact on the overall size of the \$9 Billion Universal Service Fund.

Telemedicine services benefit more than just a community's health. In addition to filling the health gap at a lower cost than traditional medicine, telehealth networks spur additional business activity and economic growth. Yet the majority of clinics do not have sufficient bandwidth to exchange electronic medical records or provide remote home monitoring. The [majority of non-metro clinics](#) have Internet speeds that are significantly less than speeds needed for quality telemedicine.

“We believe that increasing funding for the RHC program is one of the most important steps that Congress and the FCC can take to improve the quality of life in rural America,” said Windhausen. “We encourage Senate and House leaders to urge the FCC to increase funding for the sake of improving rural America’s healthcare.”

Visit <http://www.shlb.org/policy/Rural-Health-Care> to learn more about SHLB’s advocacy to improve our nation’s telehealth.

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About SHLB:

The SHLB Coalition is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization that supports open, affordable, high-capacity broadband connections for anchor institutions and their surrounding communities. The SHLB Coalition is based in Washington, DC and has a diverse membership of commercial and non-commercial organizations from across the United States. To learn more, visit www.shlb.org.