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Program to create networks

Ohio hopes to improve hospital, public access to high-speed Internet

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Beacon Journal staff report

The Federal Communications Commission will contribute \$35.4 million toward developing four regional "telehealth networks" in Ohio, giving rural residents high-speed Internet access to acute, primary and preventive health care.

The amount — the largest given to any state — is part of the FCC's \$417 million national Rural Health Care Pilot Program.

In Ohio, the money will help the Ohio Supercomputer Center's ability to create broadband connections for nearly half of Ohio's 88 counties, allowing data to travel quickly in areas that have been stuck in the cyber Stone Age.

"Regional telehealth networks will help make Ohio healthier by propelling the adoption of new technology and ways to exchange health information," said Gov. Ted Strickland.

The networks will also give rural hospitals and clinics access to Internet2, the primary national research and education network in the country. This fulfills a key requirement of the grant — that the health-care traffic be able to flow across the country from Ohio.

And connecting health-care facilities to each other and to rural residents is just the beginning.

Ohio Supercomputer Executive Director Stanley Ahalt said the state "should be able to leverage the Ohio connections for productive purposes beyond health care . . . (and) significantly expedite Gov. Strickland's Broadband Ohio plan to deploy high-speed connections to every county."

One of the four Ohio networks is the Northeast Ohio Regional Health Information Organization, which will receive \$11.3 million to expand and upgrade a network to connect 19 medical facilities.

This regional network will affect 22 counties, including Summit, Stark, Medina, Portage and Wayne.

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