

Vermont

Community Development • Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant

Connecting Patients with Healthcare Providers in Northern VT

In January 2021, North Country Hospital and its 15 network partners received a \$994,326 Distance Learning & Telemedicine (DLT) grant from the USDA to expand and secure their services with telehealth carts, patient monitoring systems and upgraded digital security.

The COVID pandemic of '20 - '21 saw rural Americans suffer higher infection and mortality rates than urban and suburban populations. Due to a handful of key factors—among them lack of real-time access to healthcare providers—the health disparity between urban and rural communities is generally independent of the coronavirus, but the pandemic nonetheless underscored its significance.

In northern Vermont, including the Northeast Kingdom (NEK)—a USDA-designated Rural Economic Area Partnership Zone—doctors, nurses and healthcare workers collaborate with great effort but need better equipment and connectivity to make their services more accessible to rural patients.

[USDA RD's Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant](#) program helps rural communities use the unique capabilities of telecommunications to connect to each other and to the world, overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density.

This DLT project benefits 64,260 northern Vermont patients with diverse healthcare services: visiting nurses, primary care, rehab & therapy, assisted living for the elderly, specialty health clinics, opioid recovery, pediatric care, sleep-disorder therapy and a critical-access hospital.



Above, L to R: Mary Esposito, CIS Manager; Kate Pierce, CIO/CISO; Shane Manning, IT Technical Supervisor; displaying North Country Hospital's 2021 CHIME Most Wired award; Below: North Country Hospital, Newport, VT.

- Date of Obligation:** 1/5/21
- Congressional District:** Rep. Welch, Vermont; Sen. Leahy and Sen. Sanders
- Partners:** Vermont Technical College, Maple Lane Nursing Home, Union House Nursing Home, Newport Healthcare, Bel-Aire Nursing Home, Journey to Recovery Community Center, Orleans/Essex Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice
- Demographics:** Vermont Northeast Kingdom - Designated REAP Zone
- Impact:** To address the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural communities, USDA RD awarded \$994,326 to North Country Hospital and its network partners through a DLT grant to help expand and diversify healthcare services for 64,260 people in northern Vermont.