



News Release

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Omnibus Bill Includes Additional USDA Funds to Address Opioid Epidemic

E-Connectivity to Help Provide Health Care and Educational Services

WASHINGTON, March 23, 2018 – The Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett today praised an omnibus spending bill that includes an additional \$20 million for a key USDA program that is helping address the nation’s opioid crisis. The funding comes at a time when President Donald J. Trump is pursuing an ambitious agenda to combat the nation’s opioid crisis.

“Opioid misuse in rural communities is more than just an issue of public health. It is an issue of rural prosperity,” Hazlett said. “Telemedicine bridges the gap between rural communities and the medical treatment essential to recovery.”

The \$20 million supplement is being provided in USDA’s [Distance Learning and Telemedicine \(DLT\) Grant Program](#). Advanced technologies supported through the DLT program give rural communities all the modern tools possible to fight the opioid epidemic, including:

- Prevention: making sure doctors’ offices and pharmacies are connected to real-time controlled substances (opioid) patient registries
- Treatment: training health care providers on how to identify and treat addiction
- Recovery: providing remote access for addiction treatment counseling

DLT grants are available to most state and local governmental entities, federally-recognized tribes, non-profit groups, for-profit businesses or a consortia of these.

The \$20 million supplement is in addition to \$29 million that Congress provided for the DLT program’s annual budget this year. The \$29 million also may be used for opioid-related projects, but, unlike the \$20 million, it is not specifically targeted to those purposes.

The DLT program has been particularly effective in addressing generational poverty, which is often is linked to rural isolation and a lack of access to education. These factors can lead to a sense of isolation and desperation that sometimes results in drug abuse.

USDA is actively involved in the opioid issue. Earlier this month, Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett began a series of monthly roundtables on the subject. Upcoming roundtables are scheduled for April 11 in Utah, May 9 in Kentucky, June 6 in

Oklahoma and July 11 in Maine. Please contact the Rural Development [State Office](#) for times, locations and registration information.

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 services such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov.

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