



**Rural Development**

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# News Release

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## **USDA Provides Funding to Increase Access to Educational and Health Care Services in Rural Areas** *Grants Will Also Support Opioid Treatment*

NORTH CAROLINA, January 19, 2018 – Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett today announced that USDA is awarding grants for broadband projects to increase access to job training, educational and health care services in rural areas in 35 states.

“Broadband technology helps provide career opportunities and deliver critical medical services to rural residents,” Hazlett said. “It allows rural hospitals to better diagnose and treat patients. It helps treat people who are struggling with opioid and other substance use disorders. It also helps bring jobs to rural areas.”

USDA is awarding [72 grants totaling \\$23.6 million](#) through the [Distance Learning and Telemedicine \(DLT\) Grant Program](#). This program funds equipment that uses broadband to help rural communities connect to advanced learning and specialized medical services.

The grants are supporting projects in Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Several recipients will use the grants to help address two of the nation’s most urgent needs: opioid abuse treatment and mental health counseling.

Here are the projects USDA is supporting in North Carolina:

- Mission Healthcare Foundation, Inc. is receiving a \$231,192 grant to help purchase video conferencing equipment. The project will link one hub and 11 end-user sites in 11 rural communities. It will provide telemedicine carts, digital stethoscopes and horus scopes to give rural residents better access to health services and specialty care.

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- East Carolina University is receiving a \$62,772 grant to help purchase video conferencing equipment to provide interactive distance learning and telemedicine services. The project will benefit one hub and eight end-user sites in nine communities. It will provide video conferencing equipment, endodontic microscopes and software to enable the University to promote, train and develop dentistry students in the area.
- North Carolina Central University is receiving a \$499,081 grant to help create a distance learning program, named the Virtual Justice Project, to enable citizens of North Carolina to access legal services at the University. Nineteen end-user sites in central and western North Carolina will have access to the Virtual Justice Project. Many low- and moderate-income North Carolinians will have increased access to free or reduced-cost legal education and services that will enable them to represent themselves in an informed manner, or seek pro bono services.
- East Carolina University is receiving a \$395,000 grant to help purchase video conferencing equipment to provide interactive distance learning. The project will benefit two hub and 17 end-user sites in 15 communities. It will provide video conferencing equipment to enable the University to connect with community colleges and high schools to allow the sharing of classrooms and teachers.

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.

USDA Rural Development annually invests \$1.5 billion, on average, in North Carolina's rural communities. USDA Rural Development has 6 Area Offices and 14 field offices across the state serving North Carolinians living in rural areas and communities. Area Office locations are in Asheville, Shelby, Lumberton, Asheboro, Henderson and Kinston. For more information, visit [www.rd.usda.gov/nc](http://www.rd.usda.gov/nc)

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