

South Dakota

Rural Utilities Service • Distance Learning and Telemedicine

Pioneering Innovative Ways of Service and Infrastructure Development for Rural Areas

With the passage of time, rural areas continue to have challenges. Lack of infrastructure, distance to services, and a qualified workforce continue to plague rural health care facilities.

In the eastern corner of the state of South Dakota, a strong telehealth network is consistently working in partnership with USDA to pioneer innovative ways to provide service and infrastructure development in rural areas to help reverse the trend.

In fiscal year 2020, Avera Health was awarded \$985,399 from USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grant program to provide telemedicine software and equipment to ensure equitable health care access at rural, sparsely staffed medical facilities in a seven-state (IA, KS, MN, MT, ND, NE, and WY), 66 county area in the Upper Midwest through Avera Health's Emergency Telemedicine Project.

This project's focus is on improving the quality of life and quantity of life by providing access to up-to-date quality specialty healthcare, including treatment and prevention of opioid misuse.

"Through the USDA's DLT program, Avera eCARE Emergency will be able to provide rural hospitals with the latest technology. The grant funding will purchase videoconferencing cameras, microphones, monitors and specialized phones to initiate a telemedicine encounter simply by the push of a button. We are extremely grateful for organizations that recognize the importance of offering funding support for our rural hospitals to ensure the best quality of care for their patients, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic." Deanna Larson, CEO of Avera eCARE

Since 2003, Avera Health has received \$7,980,609 from USDA. These USDA grants have been instrumental to Avera Health in developing and expanding telehealth services cost effectively to the smallest and most underserved hospitals and communities.



Rachel Sherard at right provides a tour of the Avera Health facility to Deputy Under Secretary Bette Brand at left.

Obligation Amounts: \$985,399 DLT FY 2020

Date of Obligations: 08/20/2020

Congressional District: Representative Dusty Johnson, District; Senators John Thune and Mike Rounds

Partners: Avera Health and USDA Rural Development

Demographics: Avera Health is an integrated health system based in Sioux Falls, SD that provides top-quality health services. Avera serves a population of nearly one million throughout a geographical footprint of 72,000 square miles and 86 counties in the Upper Midwest. They offer a wide range of specialists throughout their innovative Avera eCARE telemedicine services available at more than 150 Avera clinics and doctors' offices across the region.

Impact: Avera serves South Dakota and surrounding areas of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming through six regional centers in Aberdeen, Mitchell, Pierre, Sioux Falls and Yankton, SD, and Marshall, MN. Avera serves through 35 hospitals, 215 primary and specialty care clinics, 40 senior living facilities in addition to home care and hospice, sports and wellness facilities, home medical equipment outlets and more.

Avera's systems serve 51 South Dakota counties and employs more than 19,000 individuals, making it South Dakota's largest employer.

Story updated Month November 2020 • USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

