

Local Hospitals Save BIG \$\$ on Telecommunications Costs

Telecommunication costs for rural health care providers can be expensive—very expensive, as compared to what their urban counterparts pay for the same types of services. The United States government answered the financial distress call of rural health care providers by implementing the Rural Health Care Program of the Universal Services Fund mandated by The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Act established in 1996.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL SERVICES?

The Rural Health Care Program of the Universal Service Fund provides discounts to eligible rural health care providers for telecommunication services and monthly Internet service charges. This program is intended to ensure that rural health care providers pay no more for telecommunications costs in the provision of health care services than their urban counterparts pay. The level of support is contingent on the location and the types of services. Health care providers can save on services they already have, upgrade current services, or install new services.

IT CAN BE DONE!

The Universal Services Fund application process can deter many facilities from completing the applications but with determination and hard work it can be done. Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. assisted two local rural not-for-profit hospitals through the Universal Services Fund application process for reduced telecommunications costs. Florida Hospital (locations in Sebring, Lake Placid, and Wauchula) and DeSoto Memorial Hospital (located in Arcadia) have utilized the Universal Services Fund and were able to enjoy a **huge** savings on their telecommunications costs for Funding Year 2004-2005. With one hospital location in Hardee County and two locations in Highlands County, Florida Hospital has numerous telecommunications lines that cost in excess of \$100,000 per year without the assistance of the Universal Services Fund. Through their utilization of the Universal Services Fund, Florida Hospital was able to save **\$61,722.00** on their telecommunications costs in FY 2004-2005! DeSoto Memorial Hospital, with one location in Arcadia, enjoyed a savings of **\$922.00** for their one telecommunication line. Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. is currently awaiting the savings for the FY 2005-2006 applications for both Florida Hospital (all three locations) and DeSoto Memorial Hospital and is in the process of submitting applications for FY 2006-2007 for these facilities.

HOW CAN MY FACILITY SAVE MONEY?

Anyone interested in learning more about the Universal Services Fund or is interested in pursuing the application process for reduced telecommunications/Internet costs, is encouraged to contact Kelly J. Johnson, Health Planning Director for Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc., at **863-452-6530** or via e-mail **kelly.johnson@hrhn.org**. Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. is available to provide consultative services for the Universal Services Fund application process for a reasonable consulting fee. If you are interested please contact Kelly Johnson.