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PROTECT USF

Case studies highlighting outcome-based impacts of E-Rate and Rural Health Care funding in communities

The Universal Service Fund (USF) is a lifeline for schools, libraries, and healthcare providers, ensuring they have access to affordable, high-speed broadband. This connectivity is essential for students, library patrons, telehealth patients, and even entire communities. However, this critical funding is under threat. To highlight its impact, SHLB has gathered real-world success stories that showcase how USF programs—including E-Rate and Rural Health Care—are transforming lives and bridging the digital divide.

SHLB
SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES
BROADBAND COALITION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE SCHOOLS, HEALTH & LIBRARIES BROADBAND COALITION

The SHLB Coalition is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization that supports open, affordable, and high-quality broadband connections for anchor institutions and their surrounding communities. The SHLB Coalition is based in Washington, D.C., and incudes a diverse membership of commercial and non-commercial organizations across the United States. To learn more, visit www.shlb.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Access to high-speed broadband is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity. Schools, libraries, and healthcare providers rely on robust internet connections to educate students, serve communities, and provide life-saving care. Yet, for many, reliable and affordable broadband remains out of reach.

The Universal Service Fund (USF) plays a critical role in bridging this gap by ensuring that essential institutions have the connectivity they need to support learning, healthcare, and economic opportunity.

However, this vital funding is at risk. As policymakers debate the future of the USF, it is more important than ever to highlight its real-world impact. The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition has collected success stories from across the country to illustrate how USF programs—such as E-Rate and Rural Health Care—are making a tangible difference.

These case studies showcase the voices of students, patients, librarians, educators, and healthcare professionals whose lives have been transformed by access to broadband.

Inside this publication, you will find firsthand accounts of how USF funding has empowered schools to implement digital learning, enabled libraries to provide critical resources, and equipped healthcare providers with the connectivity needed for telemedicine and patient care. These stories demonstrate the far-reaching benefits of universal broadband access and serve as a call to action to protect and strengthen the USF.

By sharing these experiences, we hope to emphasize the urgent need for continued investment in broadband for community anchor institutions. The USF is not just about connectivity—it is about opportunity and the future of our nation's students, patients, and lifelong learners.

FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fresno, California - established in 1873

Service Territory	Student Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Urban	70,000	114 sites	$27M Cat 1 $23M Cat 2	$40M over 20 years	100x speeds 110 fiber miles

Transforming Learning Through Personalized Learning and Innovations (PLI)

Fresno Unified School District's Personalized Learning and Innovations (PLI) program transformed teaching and learning, reaching more than 25,000 students each year. Over 900 teachers and 55 schools have participated in the program since its launch in 2016.

PLI integrates technology into classrooms to support instruction tailored to each student's needs through E-Rate funded programs, including high-speed internet and strong campus-wide Wi-Fi. The district's network refresh, also supported by E-Rate, eliminated connectivity issues and ensured reliable access to digital resources.

Today, with robust fiber and Wi-Fi infrastructure in place, teachers use a wide range of digital tools, and students benefit from personalized, interactive learning experiences. Both students and teachers who engage with educational technology see thoroughly improved outcomes.

Overcoming Barriers to Learning with E-Rate

Given that 89% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch (and struggle against other disparities), internet access provided through the schools plays a critical role in supporting learning. While classroom connectivity remains the foundation, Fresno Unified has expanded its efforts beyond the school walls.

FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The district's Bus Wi-Fi Program, funded through E-Rate Category 1, allows students to study during commutes, which boosts engagement and reduces behavior issues on buses. Fresno's hotspot program also helps students stay connected at home, addressing challenges related to broadband cost and availability in many neighborhoods.

E-Rate Category 2 funding enabled the network modernization project in 2015 and the ongoing network refresh. This funding strengthened cybersecurity—protecting students, staff, and critical infrastructure from growing cyber threats. These investments ensure Fresno's digital environment remains safe, secure, and resilient.

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without E-Rate, Fresno Unified's digital infrastructure would fall behind, setting student learning back decades. The district warns that losing funding would make it difficult—if not impossible—to provide the technology-enabled education students need to gain the knowledge and skills to compete.

- 70,000 students and 10,000 staff rely on E-Rate-supported internet daily.
- Low-income students would lose access to vital digital learning tools.
- The district would not be able to afford network maintenance and upgrades, leading to slower, unreliable, and less secure networks.
- Fresno's workforce, and thus economy, would suffer as students graduate without essential digital skills.

Student and Teacher Outcomes

""Without E-Rate, our students wouldn't have the access they need to learn, grow, and compete. This funding levels the playing field for economically challenged rural schools like ours." – Teacher Testimonial

"I've been in education for decades, and I've seen firsthand what happens when students don't have reliable internet. Broadband access in and beyond school is now essential —it's how we provide rich, rigorous, and relevant learning experiences to improve student success." – Teacher Testimonial

GRANITE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Granite, Oklahoma - established in 1904

Service Territory	Student Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural	230	1	$400K +	$1M+	Increased to 600Mbps

Expanding Learning Opportunities Through Broadband

Granite Public Schools in rural Western Oklahoma relies on high-speed internet to deliver modern, technology-driven education. With limited local resources, broadband is essential for instruction, assessments, and daily operations. E-Rate funding has helped the district upgrade its network, ensuring reliable access to digital tools, virtual interventions, and online assessments.

Every classroom uses online learning platforms, and programs like state testing, academic interventions, and alternative education all depend on broadband.

Beyond the Classroom: Broadband's Impact on Students

Broadband also enables secure online counseling, offering vital mental health support in a rural setting. Students can receive help during school hours without long commutes to distant clinics—a major benefit for those balancing academic, family, or work responsibilities. With limited access to specialists and budget constraints for hiring counselors, online support is essential for student well-being.

Virtual field trips bring otherwise inaccessible experiences to students, overcoming barriers of distance, cost, and logistics. At Granite, where funding cuts have eliminated arts and music programs in the high school, virtual field trips now provide cultural opportunities students might otherwise miss.

GRANITE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

For many students, school-provided internet is their only broadband access, as home connectivity remains a challenge. Without a strong school network, students risk falling behind in digital literacy, homework, and college applications. Investing in digital infrastructure means investing in the future of the community, as many graduates return to reinvest in their hometown.

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate funding, Granite Public Schools would face:

- Challenges maintaining digital infrastructure, making state-mandated testing and online curriculum difficult.
- Loss of alternative education programs, which rely entirely on digital platforms.
- Reduced access to modern digital tools, leaving students unprepared for higher education and careers.
- A setback for the entire community, as technology skills become increasingly essential for future success.
- A widening digital divide for rural students, limiting their potential and deepening disparities with their urban peers.

For rural students, E-Rate ensures access to the same opportunities as their urban peers. Without it, Granite students would face a growing digital divide, limiting their potential for years to come.

Student and Teacher Outcomes

Without continued E-Rate funding, teaching effectiveness would decrease. Teachers use broadband for many resources regarding their professional development opportunities, lesson planning, student engagement, data tracking and much more! Faculty and staff use it for emergency communication systems, security monitoring, and alerts.

In short, E-Rate funding has made monumental strides in not only educating our youth but also increasing the employability of our graduates. This increases the economic growth of our communities, cities, states and nation.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

State of Alaska - established in 1996

Service Territory	Student Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural & Urban	129,900+	493 sites	$231M (2024)	$253 M	Most schools in the state have speeds over 100 Mbps

Bridging the Digital Divide in Alaska's Rural Communities

High-speed broadband has transformed education in Alaska's most remote communities, where geographic barriers have historically limited access to modern learning tools and essential services. E-Rate funding has played a vital role in overcoming these challenges, providing the infrastructure needed to connect schools and libraries to high-speed internet.

Broadband connectivity means access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, career and technical education (CTE) training, and dual-enrollment college classes (especially for students in particularly isolated areas). These digital resources expand educational and career pathways, ensuring that students in rural Alaska have the same opportunities as those in urban areas.

Additionally, libraries serve as critical digital hubs for residents who lack home internet access. Telehealth services, workforce training programs, and free Wi-Fi hotspots make libraries lifelines for rural communities, offering resources that would otherwise be unavailable.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate investment, schools and libraries in Alaska would struggle to sustain broadband access, leading to:

- Reduced access to online education, cutting off students from remote learning programs.
- Disruptions to career and technical training, impacting job readiness.
- Severe limitations on telehealth services, making it harder for rural residents to receive medical care.

In a state where connectivity is often the only bridge to opportunity, losing E-Rate funding would exacerbate the digital divide, leaving thousands of Alaskans without essential educational and professional resources.

Student and Teacher Outcomes

"With the high cost of internet services at our rural school sites our participation in the E-Rate program is the reason Southwest Region Schools has been able to provide our students access to internet and online programs to support their educational needs as well as provide students with connectivity many do not have in the home. Without the support we receive from the E-Rate program the district would not be able to affordable level of connectivity we need to support our students testimonials here." – SWR School District

"Without the support of E-Rate, many of these districts would literally be thrown back to the "T-1 dark ages" of the past, rendering them unable to provide the connectivity necessary for effective student engagement and learning. One such example is the Pribilof School District, located in the Bering Sea, 300 miles from mainland Alaska. On St. George Island, where no teaching staff is available on-site, students rely entirely on internet connectivity to access instruction from St. Paul Island School, located 80 air miles away. The E-Rate program has made this possible, bridging the educational divide for these isolated students. This same story can be told by many of our districts across the state." – SERRC

"The E-rate program and the funding it provides is a critical piece of our strategic plan to provide robust educational services, and to mitigate risk." – RNSB School District

REGION 16 EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER

State of Texas - established in 1967

Service Territory	Student Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural	50,000+	52+	$28M	$300,000+ annually	Created a 10Gb resilient fiber network

Empowering Rural Texas Schools Through Connectivity

The Region 16 Education Service Center is driving expanding broadband access for schools across the Texas Panhandle. Through E-Rate funding, the center developed a dedicated 10Gb resilient fiber infrastructure, providing schools with a distance learning network, including secure and reliable high-speed internet to support digital learning, cybersecurity, and operational efficiency.

Before these broadband upgrades, many rural schools struggled with slow, unreliable internet, making it difficult to conduct online testing, provide 1:1 digital device programs, and offer virtual career training and college prep programs.

Now, with high-speed connectivity, students have access to online coursework in specialized subjects not offered locally, workforce readiness programs that prepare them for high-demand careers, and cloud-based learning tools and services giving rural schools access to cutting-edge technologies.

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate investment, schools in the Texas Panhandle would struggle to sustain broadband access, leading to:

- Increased costs, forcing districts to reduce broadband access.
- Declining cybersecurity, exposing student data to greater risks.
- Limited digital resources, leaving students without the tools they need for college and career readiness.

In a region where broadband access is essential for educational equity and economic development, losing E-Rate funding would widen the digital divide, making it harder for rural students to compete in an increasingly technology-driven world

Student and Teacher Outcomes

A teacher in Region 16 recalled how students in her rural district were previously unable to complete college applications because the internet would crash during peak hours. Since the 10Gb fiber upgrade, students have uninterrupted access to vital online resources, leveling the playing field for rural communities.

"The E-Rate program is indispensable for Canyon ISD. The 70% discount makes critical internet access and network upgrades affordable, providing our over 11,000 students with the technological tools and access they need to succeed."

— Dr. Darryl Flusche, Canyon ISD Superintendent

"For Dumas ISD, serving nearly 4,000 students, the E-rate program's 80% discount isn't just beneficial—it's indispensable. It provides the essential digital backbone, ensuring we can afford the robust connectivity and network infrastructure necessary to deliver the modern education our students deserve."

— Monty Hysinger, Dumas ISD Superintendent

OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARY INFORMATION NETWORK (OPLIN)

Columbus, Ohio - established in 1996

Service Territory	Patron Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural & Urban	11.6 million	251	$11.65M since 2016	$1.5M in 2024	High-speed broadband to all libraries

Libraries as Digital Lifelines in Ohio

OPLIN serves as a critical backbone for broadband access across Ohio's 251 public library systems, ensuring that millions of residents have access to reliable, high-speed internet. Public libraries are often the only place where individuals in rural and underserved communities can connect to the internet for essential needs such as job applications, healthcare resources, and online education.

Thanks to E-Rate funding, OPLIN has been able to secure competitive statewide broadband contracts for libraries, reducing costs and significantly improving internet reliability and speed. Over 55.5 million Wi-Fi sessions were recorded in Ohio's libraries in the past year alone, a testament to how much residents depend on these digital hubs. OPLIN's support extends beyond just connectivity.

For example, programs such as "In the Company of Heroes" at Licking County Library showcase how broadband access enables veterans and their families to digitally preserve and share military records, fostering community engagement and historical preservation.

And at Jackson City Library, broadband access has played a lifesaving role during natural disasters. Following a major storm, the library became a safe haven, providing residents with warmth, Wi-Fi, and charging stations. Without E-Rate-funded broadband, this vital community support would not be possible.

OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARY INFORMATION NETWORK (OPLIN)

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate investment, libraries across Ohio would struggle to sustain broadband access, leading to:

- Reduced internet access for job seekers, students, and veterans who rely on libraries for digital resources.
- Fewer educational and career training opportunities, limiting workforce readiness.
- Increased costs for libraries, forcing budget cuts to essential services.

E-Rate funding accounts for 25% of OPLIN's operating budget, and any reduction would significantly impact library broadband affordability, ultimately hurting the millions of Ohioans who depend on it.

Library Patron and Staff Outcomes

"The day after the recent devastating storm, every one of our computers was in use, and every free table was taken with people using our Wi-Fi and charging their devices. Patrons knew they could rely on the library for a warm, safe place to find some comfort during this stressful time."

— Jon Simmons, Jackson City Library

"Because OPLIN receives around 70% in discounts on connections and data through the E-Rate program, the loss of funding would force us to make immediate cuts in service. That would result in lost opportunities for citizens who use the library to find jobs, do schoolwork, complete forms and applications, and engage in the online economy."

— Don Yarman, OPLIN Executive Director

COCHISE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT

Bisbee, Arizona - established in 1986

Service Territory	Patron Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural	50,383	5	730,172 since 2002	N/A	10x Speed

Providing Lifelines for Rural Communities

In Cochise County, Arizona, many rural residents rely on their local public library as their only dependable source of high-speed internet. While broadband exists in parts of the county, coverage is inconsistent and often poor near the most rural branches, leaving many residents without reliable access at home.

Thanks to E-Rate funding, the Cochise County Library District has upgraded internal networks, increased speeds tenfold, and expanded free Wi-Fi across five branch libraries. This has significantly improved internet access for students completing schoolwork, job seekers submitting applications, and off-grid residents who rely on the library for essential online services.

The impact of this access goes beyond everyday convenience—it's a lifeline for digital inclusion and economic mobility. Patrons have used the library's internet to connect with family, purchase essential goods, and even build homes using online resources.

COCHISE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate investment, libraries in Cochise County would struggle to provide reliable broadband access, leading to:

- Limited digital access for rural residents, cutting off opportunities for remote work, telehealth, and online education.
- Severe reductions in Wi-Fi availability, forcing patrons to travel long distances to access the internet.
- Increased operational costs, reducing funding for books, community programs, and essential library services.

In remote Arizona communities, where broadband access is already scarce, losing E-Rate support would further isolate residents and deepen the digital divide.

Library Patron and Staff Outcomes

""The ability to access the internet at my local library has been an extreme benefit to me. High-speed internet is scarce to non-existent in my community. For over ten years, I've relied on the library for reliable internet." – Library Patron

"Living off-grid has its own set of difficulties, and internet access is a major one. Had it not been for the library's Wi-Fi, I would have been completely cut off at times. I've used it for everything—buying goods, paying bills, even building my home!" – Library Patron

"A patron needed to wipe their laptop clean before selling it. At home, it would have taken six hours. At the library, it took 25 minutes." – Library Staff

"One library user came in for a remote job interview. They didn't have internet at home and only had a phone with no data. Thanks to the library's Wi-Fi, they completed the interview— and later came back to tell us they got called back for an in-person interview!" – Library Staff

CASA GRANDE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Casa Grande, Arizona - established in 1913

Service Territory	Patron Population	# of Sites	E-Rate Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural & Urban	58,648	2	$200,000 since 2016	N/A	High speed internet at both locations

Bridging the Digital Divide in Rural Arizona

For many residents of Casa Grande and surrounding rural areas, the public library is the only place they can access high-speed internet. Many households lack broadband service due to high costs or lack of infrastructure, making the library's public internet computers and Wi-Fi essential lifelines.

The E-Rate program has enabled the library to maintain reliable, high-quality broadband access, supporting job seekers, students, and individuals accessing government services. The local government would struggle to sustain connectivity, limiting critical resources for the community without crucial funding.

For some patrons, internet access at the library is the key to advancing their education. One student, working toward an undergraduate degree, relies on the library's high-speed Wi-Fi and study rooms to complete online exams. Without this resource, she would lack the privacy and connection needed to succeed in her coursework.

The library also plays a crucial role in workforce development. A recent success story involves a patron who arrived at the library unfamiliar with digital tools. With help from library staff, he learned to navigate job postings, create a résumé, and develop key skills, while eventually securing a high-paying position beyond his expectations.

CASA GRANDE PUBLIC LIBRARY

What's at Stake Without E-Rate?

Without continued E-Rate funding, Casa Grande Public Library would face severe challenges in providing broadband access, leading to:

- Fewer opportunities for job seekers who depend on library internet to apply for employment.
- Limited access to online education, making it harder for students to complete degrees.
- Cuts to essential library services, as funding would have to be reallocated.

For rural Arizona communities, broadband access is not just a convenience—it is a necessity for education, economic mobility, and staying connected. Without E-Rate, Casa Grande would see a widening digital divide, further isolating residents who already face barriers to connectivity.

Library Patron and Staff Outcomes

"Without the library's Wi-Fi, I wouldn't have been able to complete my degree. The quiet study spaces and reliable internet made all the difference in my success."

– Library Patron

"When I moved here, I didn't have access to a computer or the internet. The library staff helped me learn how to apply for jobs online. Thanks to their support, I landed a job that pays more than I ever thought possible."

– Library Patron

NORTH CAROLINA TELEHEALTH NETWORK ASSOCIATION

Eastern North Carolina - Est. 1997, *acquired by ECU Health in 2022*

Service Territory	Patient Population	# of Sites	RHC Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural	1.5M +	6	Telestroke participants received $524K to date	$288K	Life saving care provided in patient's home community

Expanding Access to Life-Saving Stroke Care (A Case Study by NCTNA)

Eastern North Carolina is part of the nation's "Stroke Belt," where stroke mortality rates are among the highest in the country. Many counties in Vidant Health's (now ECU Health's) service area experience stroke death rates twice the national average, disproportionately impacting African Americans, who are more likely to suffer strokes at younger ages. Given the high rates of disability and the economic burden associated with strokes, timely access to care is essential.

To address this crisis, Vidant Health partnered with Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center to create a Telestroke Network, connecting six rural hospitals with 24/7 access to acute stroke specialists. Through high-speed broadband provided by the North Carolina Telehealth Network Association (NCTNA), emergency physicians at these hospitals can immediately consult with stroke specialists via telemedicine robots, enabling faster and more effective treatment decisions.

With real-time imaging and specialist guidance, stroke patients are diagnosed and treated significantly faster, reducing the risk of long-term disability and improving survival rates. Over half of Telestroke patients are now able to remain in their local hospitals for recovery, staying close to family and support systems while receiving expert care.

NORTH CAROLINA TELEHEALTH NETWORK ASSOCIATION

What's at Stake Without Rural Health Care Funding?

Without continued Rural Health Care program investment and reliable broadband infrastructure, the Telestroke Network's ability to provide life-saving interventions would be severely compromised, leading to:

- Delays in stroke diagnosis, increasing the risk of long-term disability or death.
- Reduced access to specialist care, forcing patients to travel long distances for treatment.
- Higher healthcare costs, as more patients require long-term rehabilitation and care.

For rural North Carolina, broadband is not just a tool—it is a life-saving necessity. Without sustained funding, hospitals in the region would lose their ability to provide timely, expert stroke care, putting thousands of patients at risk.

Patient and Staff Outcomes

"Without the Telestroke Network, our ability to diagnose and treat strokes in real time would be impossible. The broadband connection ensures immediate access to specialists who can guide life-saving interventions."

— Dr. Charles H. Tegeler, Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center

"Telemedicine gave us access to expert stroke care without having to leave our community hospital. I was able to stay close to home while receiving world-class treatment."

— North Carolina Patient

PROVIDENCE HEALTH

Western USA - established in 1859

Service Territory	Patient Population	# of Sites	RHC Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural	5M +	1,051	$65 million	N/A	100% uptime for WAN services

High-Speed Broadband: A Game-Changer for Rural Healthcare

Providence Health operates hospitals across several rural regions in the Western U.S., where access to high-quality healthcare is often limited. With support from the Rural Health Care (RHC) program, Providence has modernized its network delivery, allowing specialized services like 3D mammography to be conducted in rural hospitals.

For breast cancer patients in remote communities, access to advanced diagnostic tools means earlier detection, better treatment outcomes, and ultimately saved lives. These life-changing services would not be possible without the broadband connectivity provided through the RHC program.

Another critical investment made possible by RHC funding was the construction of a secondary broadband infrastructure in high desert regions of Southern California.

Previously, only a single broadband provider served these remote communities, creating vulnerability to service disruptions. Thanks to RHC funding, Providence secured an alternative provider, ensuring uninterrupted broadband access for the only hospital in the area. Today, Providence maintains 99.999% uptime for wide-area network (WAN) services, a reliability level critical for emergency and specialized care.

PROVIDENCE HEALTH

What's at Stake Without Rural Health Care Funding?

Without continued RHC investment, Providence Health and other rural providers would face severe challenges, leading to:

- Fewer early cancer screenings, reducing survival rates due to delayed diagnoses.
- Higher emergency transfer rates, as rural hospitals would lack the capacity to treat complex cases locally.
- Severe broadband limitations, preventing hospitals from adopting new healthcare technologies like AI-driven diagnostics and telemedicine.

As healthcare evolves with AI, digital imaging, and advanced diagnostics, hospitals will require even greater broadband capacity. Providence projects it will need 30% more capacity every year to meet these demands. Without RHC support, rural hospitals will fall behind, leaving communities without the medical innovations they need.

Patient and Staff Outcomes

"We serve rural communities where specialty care is often unavailable. With high-speed broadband, we've expanded access to essential services like 3D mammography, saving lives through earlier breast cancer detection."

– Healthcare Provider Testimonial

"Having a secondary broadband provider has transformed our ability to offer uninterrupted care. Before this, a single service disruption could mean delays in critical treatments."

– Healthcare Provider Testimonial

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

Little Rock, Arkansas - established in 1879

Service Territory	Patient Population	# of Sites	RHC Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Rural & Urban	Arkansas 3.09M	87+ Hospitals	$400K +	N/A	State Wide Dedicated Telemed Network

The Power of Telemedicine Carts in Rural Arkansas

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has revolutionized rural healthcare through its statewide telemedicine network, UAMS e-Link. This program has bridged connectivity gaps across 87+ hospitals, ensuring rural communities have 24/7 access to trauma, stroke, and high-risk neonatal specialists.

One of the most impactful innovations has been the introduction of telemedicine carts, which bring real-time video consultations to patients in emergency rooms, rural clinics, and small hospitals. These carts enable local physicians and nurses to consult with specialists remotely, ensuring faster, more accurate diagnoses and life-saving interventions.

A woman in rural Arkansas rushed her husband to a critical access hospital after noticing stroke symptoms. Using a telemedicine cart, the ER physician connected instantly with a UAMS stroke specialist, enabling rapid clot-reducing treatment and significantly improving his recovery.

Telemedicine carts have also played a crucial role in high-risk neonatal care. In remote areas where neonatal specialists are unavailable, these carts allow pediatric experts to assess newborns virtually, determining whether they need specialized transport or can remain with their families for treatment.

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

What's at Stake Without Rural Health Care Funding?

Without continued investment in broadband and telemedicine infrastructure, hospitals across Arkansas would face:

- Delayed emergency stroke and trauma care, increasing mortality and disability rates.
- Reduced access to neonatal specialists, leading to higher risks for premature infants in rural areas.
- Greater financial strain on rural hospitals, which depend on affordable broadband to provide telehealth services.

Broadband is the digital highway for healthcare, enabling faster interventions, real-time consultations, and remote patient monitoring. If funding is cut, patients in Arkansas's most vulnerable communities would lose access to essential, life-saving care.

Patient and Staff Outcomes

"Our telemedicine carts allow us to deliver specialist care to patients who otherwise would have no access to stroke, trauma, or neonatal experts. We've seen firsthand how this technology saves lives."

— UAMS Emergency Physician

"If we hadn't had the telemedicine cart, I don't know what would have happened to my husband. That connection gave him a second chance at life."

— Spouse of Stroke Patient

Greenwood Village, Colorado - established in 1921

Service Territory	Patient Population	# of Sites	RHC Funding Received	Cost Savings	Connectivity Improvements
Urban/ Rural/ Remote	5.8M	402	$70.9M since 2013	$64.16M since 2013	Rural areas upgraded from 4.5 Mbps to 1 Gbps statewide

Broadband-Enabled Emergency Readiness for Rural Hospitals

The Colorado Hospital Association (CHA) has been at the forefront of leveraging broadband connectivity to ensure rural hospitals remain critical lifelines for their communities. Through USF's Rural Health Care (RHC) funding, CHA has empowered rural providers with the infrastructure needed to deliver telehealth, coordinate emergency transfers, and provide specialist consultations.

One of CHA's most impactful initiatives was the Colorado Combined Transfer Center (CCTC), activated at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As urban hospitals exceeded capacity, rural hospitals stepped in to absorb patients, ensuring continuity of care across the state. Without high-speed broadband, real-time coordination between providers, patient data transfers, and remote consultations would not have been possible.

The success of the CCTC program was evident again in 2022 during the RSV surge. Rural hospitals stood ready to provide additional capacity, alleviating the burden on urban centers. This model remains in place as a standby emergency system, ensuring Colorado's healthcare network is prepared for future crises.

COLORADO HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

What's at Stake Without Rural Health Care Funding?

Without continued RHC investment, Colorado's rural hospitals would face:

- Severe disruptions in emergency patient transfers, increasing mortality risks for critical cases.
- Diminished telehealth services, leaving patients without access to remote specialists.
- Greater financial strain on rural hospitals, making it harder to maintain essential digital infrastructure.

The USF program ensures that rural hospitals remain "at the ready"—capable of handling public health emergencies, natural disasters, and everyday healthcare needs. Cutting this funding would jeopardize patient outcomes and widen healthcare disparities.

Patient and Staff Outcomes

"The broadband connectivity funded through RHC transformed our emergency response capabilities. During the pandemic, it allowed us to save lives by seamlessly transferring patients to rural hospitals when urban ICUs were full."

– Healthcare Provider

"Without broadband-enabled telehealth, many of our rural hospitals would not have access to the specialists they need. RHC funding ensures that distance is no longer a barrier to quality care."

– Healthcare Provider

CONCLUSION

The stories highlighted in this booklet demonstrate the undeniable impact of the Universal Service Fund (USF) on education, healthcare, and libraries nationwide.

From providing life-saving telestroke services in North Carolina, to ensuring that rural students in Oklahoma have access to online learning, and helping veterans in Ohio connect with their history, USF funding has transformed digital access in communities large and small.

These case studies reinforce a simple truth: broadband is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Schools, libraries, and healthcare providers depend on affordable, high-speed internet to serve their communities, and without ongoing investment through E-Rate and the Rural Health Care Program, progress will stall, and millions will be left behind.

The Ongoing Need to Protect USF

The Universal Service Fund is at risk, and with it the programs that ensure access to broadband for the most vulnerable populations. Without sustained support, schools will struggle to provide digital learning opportunities, libraries will be forced to scale back essential services, and rural hospitals will face severe limitations in delivering telehealth care.

As technology advances, the demand for faster, more reliable broadband will only increase. Schools need stronger networks to support AI-driven learning tools, libraries must expand their digital services for workforce development, and healthcare providers require robust telehealth infrastructure to deliver specialized care in real-time. The USF is the foundation of this future—but only if it remains fully funded and protected.

CONCLUSION

We urge policymakers to:

✔ Strengthen and sustain the Universal Service Fund to meet the evolving digital needs of education, healthcare, and public access institutions.
✔ Ensure long-term investment in E-Rate and the Rural Health Care Program to prevent a digital divide that leaves millions without critical services.
✔ Support legislative efforts that reinforce broadband affordability, accessibility, and infrastructure expansion.

SHLB Fly-In and Next Steps

The SHLB Coalition's [Fly-In,](#) April 9-11, brought together educators, healthcare providers, library leaders, and broadband advocates to share these real-world success stories with policymakers. By advocating for continued funding and program enhancements, we ensure that students, patients, and communities remain connected to the opportunities they deserve.

Next steps:

- Join the advocacy effort: Speak with legislators about the critical role of USF in your community.
- Share your story: Real-world impact helps policymakers understand what's at stake.
- Engage in the Fly-In: Meet with decision-makers and push for policies that sustain and expand broadband equity.

The case studies in this booklet illustrate the profound impact of USF funding, but the work is far from over. With continued investment and advocacy, we can ensure that broadband remains a tool for opportunity and progress.