



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Palmetto Care Connections Receives \$300,000 Grant to expand Telehealth

BAMBERG, SC—The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of has awarded Palmetto Care Connections a \$300,000 Rural Health Network Develop grant for each of three years to establish a virtual access telehealth network and expand access to health care delivery in targeted rural S.C. communities.

The targeted communities are located in the rural counties of Bamberg, Dorchester, Georgetown, and Orangeburg. The project will meet the health care needs of the rural underserved population in the communities of Murrells Inlet, North, Orangeburg, Neeses, St. George, Cope, and Ehrhardt.

“Palmetto Care Connections is very pleased to receive this RHND grant to improve health care delivery to rural South Carolinians,” said Kathy Schwarting, CEO. “The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly changed the way that health care is being delivered, and this grant will help us build on the progress that has been made and implement telehealth in some innovative ways at rural pharmacies, churches and a tribal community resource center.”

Under the grant, Palmetto Care Connections will expand its existing rural health network to establish the South Carolina Virtual Access Telehealth Network (SC VATN) by adding rural, independent pharmacies, Medical Ministries, Inc., Pine Hill Indian Community Development Initiative, and health care providers to the telehealth network services. The purpose of the project is to expand access to care in the target communities by integrating the functions of network members, staff, and the board of directors to improve population health as well as individual health outcomes.

The SC VATN will consist of 15 members. Four of the members are rural, independent pharmacies, Ehrhardt Pharmacy in Ehrhardt, Giant Discount Pharmacy in Neeses, Lee’s Inlet Apothecare in Murrells Inlet, and R&J Drugs in North. One is a non-profit organization, Medical Ministries, Inc., that operates clinics in three rural churches, Good Hope AME Church in Cope, Edisto Fork United Methodist Church in Orangeburg, and Bethel AME Church in St. George. One is a tribal affiliated community organization, Pine Hill Indian Community Development Initiative. Other members include Family Health Center Inc., CareSouth Carolina, Bamberg Family Practice, MUSC, USC School of Medicine, BlueCross BlueShield of SC, PRISMA Health, South Carolina Hospital Association and South Carolina Office of Rural Health.

Network project activities will include: implementing telehealth services; specialty and primary care integration; improving coordination of services; implementing health information technology/exchange; and implementing programs to increase primary care workforce in rural communities.



Expected program outcomes include an improvement in quality of life among chronic disease patients, an improvement in blood pressure control among hypertension patients, an improvement in HbA1c in diabetes patients, and an improvement in knowledge and/or skills among pharmacists and providers.

Established in 2010, PCC is a non-profit organization that provides technology, broadband, and telehealth support services to health care providers in rural and underserved areas in S.C. PCC leads the S.C. health care broadband consortium which facilitates broadband savings for health care providers through the FCC Healthcare Connect Fund. PCC co-chairs the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance, along with the Medical University of South Carolina, partnering with health care organizations and providers to improve health care access and delivery for all South Carolinians.

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