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Broadband Expansion

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U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller says it's time for small town health centers to have access to broadband service and by pooling federal and state funding of \$8.5 million, within the next year most small medical facilities should be digitally connected to the state's major hospitals and universities.

The first project was announced Monday at the West Virginia Broadband Summit in Charleston. The first phase is called "Metro Fiber Build." Marshall University School of Medicine, St. Mary's Medical Center and Cabell-Huntington Hospital will reach out to a group of small hospitals and medical centers in southwestern West Virginia through broadband capabilities.

"We do not have sufficient numbers of outreach programs," Senator Rockefeller said. "And you can't go door to door. But you can, if you're wired up, go through broadband and the Internet."

Rockefeller says it's difficult for many West Virginians who live in rural areas to get the kind of specialized care they need. But with broadband service at rural medical centers, a specialist's opinion is just a click away.

"You can just sit and ask questions," he said. "You can relax and communicate back and forth or physician can do that with you watching so you can find out what kind of treatment you should get."

The senator believes adding broadband will not only improve care but also increase the number of people seeking medical help. He says many times rural West Virginians don't feel comfortable at large hospitals. But with "Metro Fiber Build" they can get the care they need in a family-friendly environment they're comfortable in.

"People are sometimes reluctant to make themselves available for health care when it is in their interest," according to Rockefeller. "But this will just knock it out of the box because it's so complete."

The broadband connections for Metro Fiber Build should be in place by next June.