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## Statewide consortium awards contract for innovative telehealth project

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A telehealth consortium led by the University of California Office of the President and the UC Davis Health System — formed to create a statewide broadband system for health care — has selected AT&T to build a secure, medical-grade telecommunications system as part of the California Telehealth Network. The project will connect hundreds of health care providers throughout the state, making it one of the largest networks dedicated to health care in the nation.

AT&T's tasks for the project include establishing new, or upgrading existing, telemedicine connections, especially in rural communities throughout the state. The nearly \$30 million project will increase bandwidth capacity for telecommunications so that clinics, hospitals or other provider sites will have direct, peer-to-peer connectivity to all network members, plus connections to a wide range of external networks and services.

Led by the UC system, the California Telehealth Network (CTN) is a partnership of organizations throughout the state established in 2007 as part of a \$22 million pilot project from the Federal Communications Commission. Acceptance of the FCC award required a commitment of matching funds, which was provided by the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Teleconnect Fund (operated by the California Public Utilities Commission). The CTN was created to improve health care access for rural and medically underserved areas of the state and provide a new resource for distance learning, emergency services and disaster preparedness.

"Telehealth is the future of medicine and California is committed to leading the way," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. "We have been laying the groundwork for years to expand this technology in our state which will provide greater access to quality care and help reduce overall health care costs. I am very excited our innovative UC partners are continuing our strong leadership by working to increase telehealth connections throughout California."

Dr. Cathryn L. Nation, UC associate vice president for health sciences and services, noted the new network also is designed to address the health care disparities of a large and geographically diverse state.

"Millions of Californians live in rural and other medically underserved areas of the state," she said. "The California Telehealth Network will improve access to quality health care services for many communities where significant needs exist. Several hundred health providers have already signed Letters of Agreement, which paves the way for their participation in the new network."

Plans call for the new network to be a peer-to-peer system, enabling each member to have reliable, high-quality connections with public and nonprofit health care providers located in both rural and urban locations. Communities will benefit through improved access to clinical expertise in specialties ranging from oncology and radiology to infectious disease and psychiatry.

The network also will provide opportunities for continuing education and distance learning for health professionals, along with access to clinical research and the possibility of access to commercially hosted electronic health records systems.

The CTN complements a concurrent expansion in telehealth and eHealth made possible by Proposition 1D, an education infrastructure bond championed by Gov. Schwarzenegger and approved by California voters in 2006. The measure has been part of the governor's strategic growth plan to improve and rebuild California's infrastructure, which includes \$200 million dedicated to building out telemedicine capacity around the state. It also provides support for UC medical school facilities that will serve as training sites for the next generation of physicians and other health care professionals as health care services continue to be transformed through the use of new technologies.

Although the California Telehealth Network's emphasis is on rural connectivity, its long-range goal is to establish a statewide telehealth system that links a majority of the state's health care facilities, including those in urban areas. The network team plans to train and support participants in the use of telemedicine equipment and assist them in establishing working relationships with medical specialists and other health providers.

"Telehealth and new information technologies can help overcome health disparities by bridging geographic distances, redistributing medical expertise and creating new venues for education," said Dr. Thomas Nesbitt, associate vice chancellor for strategic technologies and alliances at UC Davis Health System. "The California Telehealth Network allows us to build upon existing telemedicine systems and truly create a structure that will serve the health care needs of Californians well into the future."

Today's contract award announcement will be finalized following formal approval by the Universal Service Administrative Co. on behalf of the FCC.

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**About the California Telehealth Network**

The California Telehealth Network (CTN) is part of an effort by the Federal Communications Commission to improve the rural health care infrastructure throughout California and the nation. The University of California Office of the President, together with the UC Davis Health System, is serving as the legally and financially responsible partner for the project. A large and diverse group of partners includes representatives from the Office of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger; California Public Utilities Commission; California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency; and the California Health and Human Services Agency. In addition to the \$22 million award from the FCC, nearly \$10 million in funding has thus far been pledged to secure this award and support operations of the CTN. Contributors include the California Emerging Technology Fund, UnitedHealth, the California Teleconnect Fund, the National Coalition for Health Integration and the California HealthCare Foundation. Participants in the project also include multiple regional and statewide associations representing health care providers and existing telehealth networks.

