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For more information, contact:
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RURAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS MAY QUALIFY
FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS DISCOUNTS

Montana's rural health care providers may be eligible for discounts on their telecommunications services from two sources -- the federal universal service fund and the state interim Universal Access Program.

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires that public and nonprofit rural health care providers receive telecommunications services that are necessary to provide health care services at rates comparable to those paid for similar services in urban areas. The law also says health care providers should have access to advanced telecommunications services.

In order to carry out that law, the Federal Communications Commission has made \$400 million available annually to fund telecommunications discounts for qualifying rural health care providers. The Rural Health Care Corporation is the entity that has been established to administer the program for rural health care providers. Applications will be available from RHCC on May 1. Interested persons should visit the RHCC's Internet web site at www.rhccfund.org to review the program guidelines and download the application form.

The May 1 application deadline is fast approaching for rural health care providers to apply for the state-funded source of telecommunications discounts. The state Universal Access Program was created by the 1997 Montana Legislature to fund telecommunications discounts for community public access points, schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. There is \$250,000 available for discounts in FY 1998 and \$500,000 available in FY 1999. May 1 is the deadline for applications for FY98 discounts and January 1, 1999, is the deadline for FY99. Applications are available by downloading them off the state Public Service Commission's Internet web site at www.psc.state.mt.us or by calling Bonnie Lorang at the PSC at 406-444-6191.

Persons with questions about the federal or state telecommunications discount programs should call Bonnie Lorang at the PSC.

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