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## **Broadband brings better access to health care**

Physicians in our area may soon be able to access patients' medical histories with the touch of a button.

Additionally, you may be cared for by a specialist hundreds of miles away.

A Federal Communications Commission pilot program will help fund four regional telehealth networks - including one in our area - to provide high-speed Internet connections to health care facilities in nearly half of Ohio's 88 counties, with the help of the Ohio Supercomputer Center Network. This will allow remote patient record sharing, diagnosing and consultation to improve the quality of care to rural areas. In all, \$417 million will flow into Ohio. Genesis HealthCare System in Zanesville and Southeastern Ohio Regional Health in Cambridge eventually would be linked to the system, as well as health centers and clinics in Crooksville, Malta and New Lexington.

The service will give patients like us in rural areas access to critically needed medical specialists in a variety of practices, including cardiology, pediatrics, and radiology. In some instances, this can be done without patients leaving their homes or communities. Intensive-care doctors and nurses can monitor critically ill patients around the clock. Video conferencing allows specialists and mental health professionals to care for patients in different rural locations, often hundreds of miles away.

Additionally, it will enable public health officials to quickly coordinate and respond to a public health emergency, such as a bioterrorism attack or disease-related outbreak.

While this technology is already available in metropolitan areas, the related cost has prohibited such accessibility in our area until now.

Better health care is not the only advantage here.

Broadband access is crucial to our economic development. It is often the decisive factor when today's modern high-tech businesses and industries are looking for a home.

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