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## **YKHC and GCI announce plans to jointly pursue federal funding for fiber internet service to Bethel**

**YKHC will leverage GCI's existing network to bring urban-level internet service to Western Alaska's largest rural economic hub**

BETHEL, Alaska, July 30, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), the Tribal health organization for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and GCI, Alaska's largest telecommunications provider, today announced that they will apply to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for a \$53 million grant to launch a project to extend high-speed, low-latency fiber internet service to Bethel, Alaska. The project, which would be completed in 2024, would bring urban-level 1 gig internet speeds and service to Bethel and other communities along the fiber route and will ultimately transform internet connectivity throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

"Fiber's high speed and almost unlimited capacity will be substantially more affordable for the families, businesses and schools of the region," said YKHC President & CEO Dan Winkelman. "Our project is truly unique and yet complementary to other regional proposals since fiber can be the backbone of any local or regional network to achieve necessary redundancy and reliability standards."

"GCI is committed to closing the digital divide in rural Alaska and has a long history of investing in rural broadband infrastructure projects," said GCI CEO Ron Duncan. "Federal broadband support has never been higher and YKHC and GCI are taking advantage of this once-in-a-generation funding opportunity to deliver urban-level internet speeds to a region that, by any measure, is one of the most remote in the nation. When the fiber project is complete, Bethel residents will enjoy internet speeds as fast or faster than those offered in New York City, Los Angeles, or Chicago."

Bethel is the transportation and services hub for the larger Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, home to roughly 30,000 Alaskans. Situated on the banks of the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers, the region is the traditional home for the Yup'ik, Cup'ik, and Athabascan people. Bethel's comprehensive, Tribal health care system serves 58 federally recognized Tribes and operates 41 village clinics, five sub-regional clinics, numerous residential and outpatient treatment programs, and a regional hospital. The region's school district office, supporting 4,300 students, is based in Bethel, as well as the headquarters for the Association of Village Council Presidents and AVCP Regional Housing Authority.

The proposed project will follow a combined submarine route from GCI's existing fiber network in Levelock, Alaska, to the mouth of the Kuskokwim River where it is expected to follow a terrestrial route to Bethel. GCI also will upgrade its local access network in Bethel to

offer lightning-fast 1 gig internet speeds to residents. YKHC and GCI are working to secure support from Tribal partners along the proposed route.

The proposed projects will be submitted for consideration by NTIA's Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, which will distribute \$1 billion for major broadband infrastructure project across the nation. The deadline for grant applications is Sept. 1, 2021, and award announcements are expected before the end of the year.

"Access to affordable fiber will launch the Yukon-Kuskokwim region deep into the technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and open the doors to a world of possibilities," said Winkelman.

GCI's commitment to the project doesn't stop in Bethel. GCI has committed to offer service improvements throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim area with substantial capacity increases to the heart of the region, which GCI plans to extend to surrounding communities through future microwave and local access upgrade projects. In addition, GCI will be upgrading wireless services in Bethel and the surrounding communities, leveraging the increased capacity that the project will bring to the region.

GCI has a long track record of delivering on ambitious projects and initiatives to connect remote Alaska communities. GCI's TERRA network, completed in 2017 with support from the Department of Agriculture's Broadband Initiatives Program, is a 3,300-mile fiber/microwave network that connects 45,000 Alaskans in 84 remote communities in the western region of the state. The Alaska United Aleutians Fiber Project, supported by the Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Program and slated for turn-up at year-end in 2022, is an 800-mile, \$58 million fiber project that will deliver 1 gig service to remote communities along the Aleutian chain including Dutch Harbor. Earlier this month, GCI announced a \$150 million partnership with Intelsat, a leading global satellite service provider, to increase satellite capacity fourfold to meet growing demand in rural communities not served by its fiber or microwave networks.

### **About YKHC**

Based in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and headquartered in Bethel, YKHC administers a comprehensive healthcare system for all residents throughout western Alaska. Each Tribe in its service area has authorized YKHC to provide health services under Title III of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Along with 12 other Tribal Organizations, YKHC is a co-signer of the Alaska Tribal Health Compact, a consortium which negotiates annual agreements with the Indian Health Service. YKHC also provides locally-based healthcare services to veterans in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Learn more about YKHC at [www.ykhc.org](http://www.ykhc.org).

### **About GCI**

Headquartered in Alaska, GCI provides data, mobile, video, voice and managed services to consumer, business, government, and carrier customers throughout Alaska, serving more than 200 communities. The company has invested more than \$3 billion in its Alaska network and facilities over the past 40 years and recently launched true standards-based 5G NR service in Anchorage, now the nation's northernmost 5G service area. Learn more about GCI at [www.gci.com](http://www.gci.com). GCI is a wholly owned subsidiary of Liberty Broadband Corporation (Nasdaq: LBRDA, LBRDK, LBRDP). Learn more about Liberty Broadband at <http://www.libertybroadband.com>.

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