

[By Howard Weiss-Tisman](#)

Brattleboro Memorial Hospital is going to have a little extra help closing its Medicare funding gap this year.

BMH is going to get almost \$2 million from the federal government in 2013 to help compensate for the Medicare reimbursement rates, which don't typically cover all of the costs hospitals incur when treating Medicare patients.

Congressman Peter Welch, D-Vt., helped get the funding included in the fiscal cliff deal that Congress approved last week.

Southwestern Vermont Medical Center in Bennington is also going to get about \$2 million.

"Hospitals like Brattleboro Memorial are absolutely vital to providing health care to seniors in rural areas," Welch said. "But with low volume and fixed costs, these rural hospitals face specific burdens that make providing care more expensive. This program provides fair reimbursement rates to those rural hospitals like BMH so they can continue to serve seniors in their communities."

Welch said the legislation was able to get through Congress because the hospitals affected by the program are in both Democratic and Republican districts.

The deal that will provide BMH and the other rural hospitals with the Medicare help will run for one more year before Congress will have to look at the program again.

There are about 200 Medicare dependent hospitals around the country and Congress established a program in 1990 to help support these hospitals, which are in rural areas.

Hospitals in the program must also have fewer than 100 beds and treat a high proportion of Medicare patients.

The program was set up to help small rural hospitals which see a high percentage of Medicare patients and are more severely affected than the larger hospitals which are able to absorb the losses caused by the low Medicare reimbursement rate.

The program would have expired on Sept. 30 but Welch was able to help include funding for the program in the fiscal deal to ensure that the rural hospitals continue to receive the benefits this year.

The help for rural hospitals came as Congress was less generous to the Medicare program in general.

The final fiscal cliff deal only paid for about half of the estimated \$30 billion Medicare fee cut that doctors are facing.