Announcements from the
Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

December 19, 2019

The Announcements will go on a brief hiatus for two weeks and return on January 9.

What's New

New Federal Funding Opportunity for the Rural Health Care Coordination Program – March 12. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) announced a new opportunity to apply for federal funding that improves access and quality of care through rural health consortiums. The program will invest approximately $7.5 million over three years to support up to 10 applicant organizations. Each consortium will include at least three health care entities that will coordinate strategies for collaboration, leadership and workforce, improved outcomes, and sustainability in rural communities. Previously funded networks under this program designed and carried out projects focused on coordinated care for patients in the primary care setting, chronic disease management, and utilizing/enhancing Health Information Technology, among other issues for rural communities. For questions about the program, contact Kanokphan Mew Pongsiri at kpongsiri@hrsa.gov.

AHA on Behavioral Health Integration. In a new issue brief, the American Hospital Association (AHA) reviews the challenges to accessing behavioral health care, reporting that “roughly 60 percent of rural America is underserved for behavioral health, and more than 85% of the nation’s behavioral health professional shortages are in rural communities.”

Overview of Behavioral Health in Rural America. For a deeper examination of behavioral health in rural areas, the Rural Policy Research Institute provides an overview of mental health conditions and contributing factors, and proposes policy options to address them.

National Council on Aging: Impact of the Opioid Epidemic on Older Adults. The report highlights the results of a survey of National Council on Aging grantees and partners on the effect of the opioid epidemic. Results show affects are both physical and financial. For rural residents, the challenges include lack of alternative approaches to managing pain that are becoming available elsewhere.

CRS Report on Broadband Access in Rural Areas. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) provides objective policy and legal analysis to committees and members of the U.S. House and Senate. For this report, researchers examine the characteristics of demand for fixed broadband in rural areas and how they affect private sector infrastructure investments.

Funding Opportunities

NIH Researching Decision Making for Individuals with Inherited Cancer Syndromes – January 21. The National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will provide grants for projects that develop, test, and evaluate interventions and implementation approaches to improve cancer risk communication between providers and patients with an inherited susceptibility to cancer so that affected individuals can make informed decisions. One focus of the program is tailored communication strategies
that address the unique needs of members of underserved populations, such as low income, uninsured, minority, rural, low literate, low numerate, and non-English speaking.

**HRSA Nurse Faculty Loan Program** – February 3. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) expects approximately $28.5 million to be available in FY 2020 to fund an estimated 90 eligible institutions. The program provides funding to accredited schools of nursing to offer loans to students enrolled in advanced education nursing degree programs who are committed to become nurse faculty. In exchange for full-time post-graduation employment as nurse faculty, the program authorizes cancelation of up to 85 percent of any such loan (plus interest thereon). Eligible applicants are accredited schools of nursing, including advanced education nursing programs.

**SAMHSA Grants to Expand Drug Treatment Courts** – February 4. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) intends to issue 25 grants of up to $400,000 each per year for up to 5 years. The program is to expand substance use disorder (SUD) treatment services in existing drug courts.

**AHRQ Research to Improve Patient Transitions through HIT** – February 5. A new funding opportunity from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) will test promising health information technology (HIT) solutions to improve communication and care coordination during transitions between multiple providers and different care settings with a focus on patients, their families, and communities. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis through December 2022.

**HRSA Funding for Postdoctoral Training in Dentistry** – February 12. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will make an estimated 28 awards for a total investment of approximately $13 million to improve oral health care services for all individuals, particularly vulnerable populations in rural and/or underserved areas. Eligible applicants include entities that have programs in dental schools, or approved residency or advanced education programs in the practice of general, pediatric or public health dentistry, which may include dental schools, public or private not-for-profit hospitals, or other public or private non-profit entities, including faith-based and community based organizations.

**HRSA Nurse Training for Behavioral Health Integration** – February 19. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will make 17 awards of up to $500,000 per year for a three-year program. Eligible applicants are accredited schools of nursing, health care facilities, or partnership of a school and facility that can train the current and future nursing workforce to provide inter-professional, evidence-based behavioral health services integrated with primary care.

**NRHA Rural Health Awards** – February 24. The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) honors individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to rural health. Awards will be presented at the *NRHA Rural Health Conference* on May 21, 2020.

**DOJ Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation to Address Crime** – February 25. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) will make 150 awards from a total investment of almost $97 million to help federally-recognized tribes and tribal organizations improve criminal justice system response to crime. Purpose areas include substance use, youth rehabilitation, violence against women and children, and community policing.

**NIH Researching Factors in Lung Cancer Disparities** – March 4. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will support research to understand factors such as social stressors and attitudes/beliefs of clinicians and patients that result in lung cancer disparities for populations that include rural, racial/ethnic minorities, sexual gender minorities, and low socioeconomic status.

**USDA Rural Broadband Loan and Grant Program** – March 16. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will make grants and loans in a pilot program to expand broadband service to rural areas. State and local governments, for-profit corporations, limited liability companies, nonprofit organizations, and tribes may apply for grants of up to $25 million, and/or loans of up to $50 million to pay for construction,
improvement, or acquisition of systems and facilities required to provide broadband service at a minimum of 25 mbps downstream and 3 mbps upstream.

**Rural Health Research**

Research in this section is provided by the HRSA/FORHP-supported Rural Health Research Gateway. [Sign up for alerts](#) when new publications become available.

**Rural-Urban Differences in Access to and Attitudes Toward Care for Medicare Beneficiaries.** Rural Medicare beneficiaries face particular hurdles in accessing care, including longer distances to health care facilities, lower median incomes, fewer private supplemental and Medicare Advantage plan options, higher disability rates (leading to greater need), and health care workforce shortages. In this brief from the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, researchers describe the differences for Medicare beneficiaries in rural and urban areas.

**Policy Updates**

Visit the [FORHP Policy page](#) to see all recent updates and send questions to [ruralpolicy@hrsa.gov](mailto:ruralpolicy@hrsa.gov).

No policy updates this week.

**Learning Events and Technical Assistance**

**New MBQIP Training for Emergency Department Transfer Communication Measure Revisions** – Thursday, January 8 at 4:00 pm ET. This hour-long session will review the [updated measure specifications](#) to this NQF-endorsed measure that captures care transition for patients admitted to the emergency department and transferred to another healthcare facility. The EDTC measure is a core measure within the Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP), a project supported by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy that invites Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) to [report their data on quality measures](#) and look for ways to improve patient outcomes.

**Resource of the Week**

**Audio – Burned Out on Burnout? Focus on Seeking Fulfillment.** This 14-minute interview features radiologists explaining why allied health professionals are prone to burnout, but offers practical advice to anyone working hard with limited resources. The audio was presented by the [American Medical Association (AMA) Ed Hub](#), a resource providing education opportunities for physicians and other members of the health care team.