

Announcements from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

April 23, 2020

What's New

[New Funding Opportunity: HRSA Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Program – May 6.](#) The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will make 50 awards of up to \$300,000 each to help tribes and tribal organizations respond to COVID-19 in rural communities. The \$15 million investment is made possible by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. To read the full application guidance, click on the “Package” tab in the link, then click “Preview” and “Download Instructions”. See the Events section below for information on a webinar for applicants taking place tomorrow, and send questions to RuralCOVIDNOFO@hrsa.gov.

[HHS Awards Nearly \\$165 Million to Combat COVID-19 in Rural Communities.](#) Yesterday, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) awarded nearly \$165 million to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in rural communities. These investments will support 1,779 small rural hospitals and provide additional funding to 14 HRSA-funded Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) to provide technical assistance on telehealth to help rural and underserved areas combat COVID-19.

[HHS Launches New Telehealth Website.](#) For patients, the website provides resources so that they can learn more about accessing health care through telehealth; for providers, the site is a resource to help them incorporate telehealth into their practices.

[ACL Announces \\$1 Billion in CARES Act Grants to Support Older Adults and People with Disabilities.](#) Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) will administer grants to boost programs that deliver meals, ensure safe transitions home following hospitalizations, and provide other essential services to older Americans and Americans with disabilities during this challenging time.

[SAMHSA to Release \\$110 in Emergency Grant Funding.](#) The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has expedited its process to release emergency grants to strengthen access to treatments for substance use disorders and serious mental illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. SAMHSA has also updated its list of [Frequently Asked Questions about provision of methadone and buprenorphine](#) for treatment of opioid use disorder during the emergency.

[Bipartisan Policy Center: Confronting Rural America's Health Care Crisis.](#) The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is a think tank combining ideas and solutions from both parties. In this report, the BPC's Rural Health Task Force makes policy recommendations to stabilize rural health care in the current emergency and the long term.

[The Journal of Rural Health: Accepted Articles on Coronavirus-Related Issues.](#) The publication is providing free access to its collection of accepted, unedited articles on how the pandemic is affecting existing issues for rural health in the United States. Subjects include suicide,

substance use disorder, telehealth, and emergency medical services. The journal has an ongoing [Call for Timely Papers on COVID-19 in Rural Areas](#).

[Federal Office of Rural Health Policy FAQs for COVID-19](#). A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from our grantees and stakeholders, updated regularly.

[CDC COVID-19 Updates](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides daily updates and guidance. New this week is a breakdown of [factors that influence racial and ethnic minority group health](#). Another page updated daily has [demographic characteristics of known cases in the U.S.](#) A CDC site for rural-specific information will have [a recording of yesterday's Coronavirus update](#) for rural stakeholders and communities, along with an archive of previous calls. [CDC also does regular clinical calls for public health emergencies](#), called Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA).

[Confirmed COVID-19 Cases, Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties](#). The RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis provides up-to-date data and maps on rural and urban confirmed cases throughout the United States. [An animated map shows the progression of cases beginning January 21](#).

[Rural Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#). The Rural Health Information Hub has created a guide to help you learn about activities underway to address COVID-19.

Funding and Opportunities

Please note that many deadlines for Federal funding opportunities have been extended. See [Approaching Deadlines](#) section below.

[DOL Building State Capacity for Apprenticeship – May 21](#). The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) will invest \$73 million in expanding the national [Registered Apprenticeship Program](#). The DOL sees apprenticeship as an industry-driven career pathway for developing a future workforce through paid work experience, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally-recognized credential for skilled workers.

[Rural PREP Microresearch Grants – May 26](#). Rural PREP – the Collaborative for Rural Primary care, Research, Education and Practice – is investing \$30,000 in local research projects leading to solutions related to primary care, population health, and workforce education and training. Eligible applicants are current students in a medical school, nurse practitioner program, physician assistant program, residents in a rural physician residency program, or other health professionals training for primary care practice in a rural location.

[NIH Utilizing Cohort Studies to Address Outcomes in Cancer Survivors – June 7](#). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will provide grants of up to \$750,000 per year for cohort studies that identify clinical, lifestyle, genomic, and other factors that affect health outcomes in cancer survivors from diagnosis to the end of life. Among sample research questions: How are physical, psychological, social, financial, and quality of life factors associated with survival and/or morbidity across various geographic areas (rural, urban), socioeconomic status, or by race/ethnicity or gender?

[DOJ Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction – June 11](#). The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) nine awards of up to \$1 million each for a three-year program to reduce serious and

violent crime and strengthen local capacity to combat drug abuse. Priority consideration will be given to applications that address challenges specific to rural communities.

[HRSA Rural Telementoring Training Center – June 16.](#) The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will make one award of \$1 million for expertise in technology-based learning models such as Project ECHO. The Rural Telementoring Training Center will develop freely accessible tools and resources to support telementoring learning program planning and implementation.

[USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants – July 13.](#) The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will make 200 awards of up to \$1 million each to enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services in rural areas. Funds support the use of telecommunications-enabled information, audio and video equipment, and related advanced technologies by students, teachers, medical professionals, and rural residents.

[NIH Research on Minority Health/Health Disparities – September 8.](#) The National Institutes of Health (NIH) includes a number of rural-specific issues for funding to support research that improves minority health and/or the reduction of health disparities at the health care system level and within clinical settings.

[USDA Capacity Building for 1890 Land-Grant Institutions – September 10.](#) The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$22 million to support projects that strengthen the research and teaching the fundamental sciences of food, agriculture, and natural resources at [1890 Land Grant Institutions](#). Priority areas for the program at these 19 historically black colleges and universities include food safety, water quality, and sustainable agriculture, with a goal of attracting and educating students from underrepresented groups.

Policy Updates

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

[Comments Requested: Medicare Revisions in Response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – June 1.](#) On March 30, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued [an array of temporary regulatory waivers and new rules](#) in response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. CMS's actions are designed to increase hospital capacity, rapidly expand the health care workforce, and further promote telehealth in Medicare. This interim final rule with comment period includes updates specific to rural health clinics and federally qualified health centers. [A full list of CMS waivers and flexibilities for COVID-19 response is available online.](#)

[Comments Requested: CMS Proposed Rule for Inpatient Rehabilitation Facilities – June 15.](#) On April 21, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) published a [proposed rule for the FY 2021 Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility Prospective Payment System](#) (IRF PPS). The proposed rule includes a 2.9 percent payment increase (\$270 million total) which rural areas will experience as an average increase of 3.2 percent. CMS is also proposing to amend the regulations to remove the post-admission physician evaluation requirement and to allow non-physician practitioners to perform certain requirements that currently a rehabilitation physician must perform. The rule also includes a five percent cap on wage index decreases and adopts the most recent Office of Management and Budget statistical area delineations with 34 urban counties becoming rural and 47 rural counties becoming urban.

[CMS Issues COVID-19 Guidance for RHCs and FQHCs](#). On April 17, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) published guidance for Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Congress and CMS made several changes to the RHC and FQHC requirements and payments. These changes include new payment for telehealth services, expansion of virtual communication services, and revision of the home health agency shortage requirement for visiting nursing services, among others. The National Association of Rural Health Clinics (NARHC) recently hosted a webinar sponsored by FORHP to explain updates to RHC stakeholders, with the [archived recording and slides available at the Rural Health Information Hub](#).

[CMS Issues Recommendations to Re-Open Health Care Systems in Areas with Low Incidence of COVID-19](#). On April 19, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued [new recommendations specifically targeted to communities that are in Phase 1](#) of the Guidelines for Opening Up America Again with low incidence or relatively low and stable incidence of COVID-19 cases. The recommendations update earlier guidance provided by CMS on limiting non-essential surgeries and medical procedures. The new CMS guidelines recommend a gradual transition and encourage health care providers to coordinate with local and state public health officials, and to review the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies, workforce availability, facility readiness, and testing capacity when making the decision to re-start or increase in-person care.

Learning Events and Technical Assistance

[AgriSafe: COVID-19 Weekly Think Tank](#) – Thursday, April 23 at 12:00 pm ET. The AgriSafe Network holds a weekly discussion with rural health and safety professionals to identify risks that farmers, farm workers and ranchers face as it relates to COVID-19.

[SAMHSA: Peer Recovery Support Across Crisis Services](#) – Thursday, April 23 at 2:00 pm ET. This hour-long webinar from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will discuss peer-run respite programs, warm lines, and peer support services within hospital emergency departments

[Application Assistance for Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response](#) – Friday, April 24 at 4:00 pm ET. In this 90-minute webinar, the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy will assist applicants of the [HRSA Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Program](#) – May 6. (See *What's New Section above for details of this new funding opportunity*.) Call-In Number **800-857-4875**; Participant Code: **3831230**.

[Telehealth 101: Intro and Q&A](#) – Fridays at 4:00 pm ET. The HRSA/FORHP-supported South Central Telehealth Resource Center (TRC) will provide the basics of telehealth and telemedicine each Friday through May 8. [Get more resources and find your regional TRC online](#).

[NOSORH Rural Health Data Institute](#) – Register by May 1. The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) will hold **a series of 90-minute webinars each week from May 12 to June 30**. Designed for those with limited knowledge of how to use data, the learning sessions will move through the process of collecting data, cleaning it up, and analyzing it in a way that everyone can understand. The Institute is open to rural health professionals, including clinical, administrative, and academic personnel.

Resource of the Week

[AHRQ's Easy-to-Understand Telehealth Consent Form](#). The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) provides a sample telehealth consent form and guidance for health care providers to use with patients.
