



Announcements from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

March 11, 2021

What's New

[HHS to Invest \\$250 Million for COVID-19 Response in Underserved Communities.](#) On Monday, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services announced a community-level program for vulnerable populations, including those in rural areas, and racial and ethnic minorities. The new initiative – **[Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19](#)** – is expected to fund approximately 30 projects in urban communities and 43 projects in rural communities (as defined by the **[Rural Health Grants Eligibility Analyzer](#)**) for two years to encourage COVID-19 safety and vaccination. Applications are due on April 20th. Eligibility is limited to local municipalities, with consideration given for **[localities with high social vulnerability](#)**.

[Deadline Extended for CMS Rural Transformation Project.](#) The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has extended the application due date for its new, rural-focused **[Community Health Access and Rural Transformation \(CHART\) Model](#)** Community Transformation Track to May 11. Optional Letters of Intent are due April 13. This voluntary payment model, the first of its kind from the CMS Innovation Center, will test whether upfront investments, predictable capitated payments, and operational and regulatory flexibilities will enable rural health care providers to improve access to care while reducing health care costs. Selected participants will have 15 months to collaborate with local partners and develop a Community Transformation Plan.

[AHRQ Data Request: Improving Rural Health Through Telehealth-Guided Provider-to-Provider Communication.](#) The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is seeking published and unpublished scientific information to inform their review of this subject. Key questions in the review include those about the effectiveness of provider-to-provider telehealth and about effective implementation strategies. Submit information to AHRQ's Evidence-Based Practice Centers Program on or before April 1.

[ERS on COVID-19 and Rural America.](#) The Economic Research Service (ERS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture analyzes county-level data on the prevalence of COVID-19 and local employment rates. A second report takes a closer look at the impact on counties where **[meatpacking accounts for more than 20 percent of employment](#)**.

[CRS on Broadband Provisions passed by Congress.](#) The Congressional Research Service (CRS) provides objective policy and legal analysis to committees and members of the U.S. House and Senate. This report provides information on each federal program included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, designed to increase broadband availability for underserved areas of the United States.

[ONC Reports on Interoperability of Electronic Health Records.](#) The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) published a data brief examining rates of **[interoperability](#)** by hospital size, type, method of interoperability, and suburban-urban status.

Share Your Thoughts and Opinions on Health – Respond by March 15. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is seeking English-speaking people living in rural areas to participate in virtual discussions about health. The purpose of these discussions is to obtain consumer feedback on newly developed health materials. HRSA is open to speaking with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Sessions will be held in March and May via Zoom and will last approximately 90 minutes. All who participate will receive monetary token of appreciation. If you or someone you know may be interested, please have them contact Heidi.Palacios@SchlesingerGroup.com or call (972) 503-3100 x-407. Feedback from rural populations will help HRSA create easy to understand health materials for everyone.

COVID-19 Resources

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

[COVID-19 FAQs and Funding for HRSA Programs.](#) Find all funding and frequently asked questions for programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

[CARES Act Provider Relief Fund Frequently Asked Questions.](#) Includes information on terms and conditions, attestation, reporting and auditing requirements, general and targeted distributions, and how to report capital equipment purchases.

[CDC COVID-19 Updates.](#) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides daily updates and guidance, including [a section specific to rural health care](#), a [Toolkit for Tribal Communities](#), and [a vaccine locator by state](#).

[CMS Coronavirus Stakeholder Calls.](#) The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) hosts recurring online sessions to provide updates, share best practices among peers, and offer attendees an opportunity to ask questions of CMS.

[HHS Coronavirus Data Hub.](#) The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) website includes estimated and reported hospital capacity by state, with numbers updated daily.

[COVID-19 Data from the U.S. Census Bureau.](#) The site provides access to demographic and economic data, including state and local data on at-risk populations, poverty, health insurance coverage, and employment.

[ATTC Network COVID-19 Resources for Addictions Treatment.](#) The Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Network was established in 1993 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The online catalog of COVID-related resources includes regularly-updated guidance and trainings for professionals in the field.

[GHPC's Collection of Rural Health Strategies for COVID-19.](#) The FORHP-supported Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) provides reports, guidance, and innovative strategies gleaned from their technical assistance and peer learning sessions with FORHP grantees. **New:** [COVID-19 Rollout in Rural Communities: Challenges, Innovations, and Unmet Needs.](#)

[Confirmed COVID-19 Cases, Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties.](#) The RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis provides up-to-date data on rural and urban confirmed cases throughout the United States. [An animated map shows the progression of cases](#) beginning March 26, 2020 to the present.

[**Rural Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019**](#). The Rural Health Information Hub has a compendium of rural-specific activities and guidelines, including [Rural Healthcare Surge Readiness](#), a tool with resources for responding to a local surge in cases.

[**SAMHSA Training and Technical Assistance Related to COVID-19**](#). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created this list of resources, tools, and trainings for behavioral health and recovery providers.

[**Mobilizing Health Care Workforce via Telehealth**](#). ProviderBridge.org was created by the Federation of State Medical Boards through the CARES Act and the FORHP-supported [Licensure Portability Program](#). The site provides up-to-date information on emergency regulation and licensing by state as well as a provider portal to connect volunteer health care professionals to state agencies and health care entities.

[**Online Resource for Licensure of Health Professionals**](#). Created by the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, the site provides up-to-date information on emergency regulation and licensing in each state for psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists assistants, and social workers.

Funding and Opportunities

[**SAMHSA: MAT for Prescription Drug and Opioid Addiction – April 27**](#). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will make up to 139 awards with a total investment of more than \$71 million to expand or enhance medication-assisted treatment (MAT) services for persons with an opioid use disorder. Eligible applicants are public and private non-profit entities.

[**Delta Region Innovative Readiness Training Medical Missions – Letters of Intent April 30**](#). The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and the U.S. Department of Defense will bring medical, dental, and optical care to rural communities in [the eight states served by the DRA](#). Selected host sites will be areas with a population of 50,000 or less, a critical shortage of health care providers, and must meet at least one of the following criteria: 1) an unemployment rate above the national average over the last 24 months, 2) per capita income 80 percent or less than the national average, and 3) a special need cause by natural disaster or other emergency.

[**CDC Preventing Violence Affecting Young Lives – May 1**](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will invest \$10 million in a five-year project to address social determinants of health and racial inequity affecting adolescents and young adults in areas with high rates of violence. Eligible applicants include state, local, and tribal governments, independent school districts, public and private institutions of higher education, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations. Priority consideration will be given to projects that focus on rural, American Indian/Alaska Native, and economically disadvantaged communities.

[**John Hopkins Center for American Indian Health Scholarship – May 1**](#). The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health will provide financial support for American Indian and Alaska Native scholars, health leaders, health professionals, and paraprofessionals who are interested in attending Summer institute courses that begin in July 2021.

[**HUD Older Adults Home Modification Grants – May 4**](#). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will make 30 awards of up to \$1.25 million each for home modifications and repairs that improve safety and accessibility for low-income elderly homeowners aged 62 or older. Eligible applicants include city, county, state, and special district governments and nonprofit organizations. At least 50 percent of the funding will be made available to communities with substantial rural populations.

[EPA Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving](#) – May 7. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will make 20 awards of up to \$160,000 each for projects that use the EPA [Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model](#) to address environmental and/or public health issues for underserved communities.

[Treasury Department Emergency Capital Investment Program](#) – May 7. The U.S. Department of the Treasury will provide funding for [Community Development Financial Institutions](#) (CDFIs) and [Minority Depository Institutions](#) (MDIs) to provide loans, grants, and forbearance for small and/or minority-owned business. A set aside of \$2 billion is available for smaller CDFIs and MDIs with less than \$500 million in assets.

Rural Health Research

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

[Sources of Insurance Coverage in Nonmetropolitan Areas: The Role of Public and Private Insurance Since 2009](#). This brief from the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis uses the American Community Survey five-estimates to compare types of health insurance coverage for the nonelderly in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas.

Policy Updates

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

No policy updates this week.

Learning Events and Technical Assistance

[CDC: Role of Telehealth in COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake](#) – Thursday, March 11 at 2:00 pm ET. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will hold a one-hour webinar with presenters who will share their experiences reaching low access communities.

[NIH Obesity and Cancer Webinar Series](#) – Thursdays at 3:00 pm ET, March 4-25. The National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will hold a series of four webinars to examine the connection between cancer, obesity, and disparities within racially-ethnically diverse populations.

[NOSORH Rural Definitions and Program Eligibility Webinar](#) – Thursday, March 11 at 3:00 pm ET. The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) will hold a webinar to examine the recent changes to the rural definition that FORHP uses to determine eligibility for grants. The webinar also will include discussion of proposed changes by the Census Bureau and by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to their designations (e.g., Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Urbanized Areas) and how those relate to FORHP's definition.

[AgriSafe: Addressing Military Needs in Agriculture](#) - Wednesday, March 17 at 1:00 pm ET. The AgriSafe Network holds a one-hour webinar for health and safety professionals in agricultural communities to learn about the needs of more than 370,000 agriculture producers who are veterans.

[SAMHSA National Advisory for Mental Health Services](#) – Thursday, March 18 at 1:00 pm ET. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will hold a 3.5 hour meeting for this National Advisory Council. Members of the public are invited to attend but registration is required.

[MATRC: Answering Questions About Telehealth and Telemental Health](#) – Friday, March 19 at 12:00 pm ET. The Mid-Atlantic Telehealth Resource Center (MATRC) holds a live, one-hour event to answer questions about the basics. The MATRC is one of [14 FORHP-Supported Telehealth Resource Centers](#). Registration is now open for the [MATRC Virtual Summit 2021 – March 28-31](#).

[HRSA Virtual Job Fair for Primary Care Clinicians and Sites](#) – Wednesday, March 24 at 5:45 pm ET. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will hold its next job fair to connect primary care trainees and practicing clinicians to approved health care sites in underserved areas. There is no registration deadline for job seekers, but **sites must register by March 17**.

[HRSA Region 1 Federal Panel Event](#) – Thursday, March 25 at 12:00 pm ET. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the New England Rural Health Association will host a 90-minute panel discussion with representatives from HRSA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration among other federal partners to discuss new priorities and initiatives for health care [in the New England region](#).

[HRSA: Addressing the Unique Needs of Black Women with HIV](#) – Thursday, March 25 at 1:00 pm ET. The Office of Women's Health (OWH) at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will hold a one-hour webinar to present data and findings from a HRSA HIV/AIDS Bureau Technical Expert Panel focused on improving prevention and treatment services for black women. [Write to OWH](#) for more information about this and other events in the *Women's Health Leadership Series*.

Resource of the Week

[Special Enrollment Period Communication Toolkit](#). The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) created outreach and education materials on the [Healthcare.gov](#) special enrollment period, which allows individuals and families to sign up for health insurance through May 15. The toolkit includes social media posts, downloadable images, a TV ad, a video, and fillable flyers in multiple languages.
