Announcements from the

Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

April 29, 2021

What's New

Comments Requested: Proposed Changes to Medicare Payments to Hospitals – June 28. This week, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released proposed updates to how Medicare reimburses acute care hospitals, Long-Term Acute Care Hospitals, and Critical Access Hospitals. There are proposals on how to implement new Graduate Medicare Education (GME) provisions in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, including how to distribute additional GME slots for rural residency training programs. The proposed rule also includes two Requests for Information: one on ways to attain health equity for all patients, and the other on the use of Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) standards to digitally submit quality information.

Population Health in Rural America in 2020: Proceedings of a Workshop. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report their findings on rural demographics and social determinants of health, data challenges, tribal health, and rural health policy. The next workshop, taking place in June, will examine the relationship between civic engagement and health equity.

NCHS Data Brief: Influenza Vaccination Rates for Children, 2019. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) finds that just over one-half of children in the United States aged 6 months through 17 years had an influenza vaccination during the year studied. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates there were more than 45,000 flu-related hospitalizations, and more than 400 deaths, for children and youth during the 2018-2019 influenza season. Across all age groups (6 months to 4 years; 5-11 years; 12-17 years), children living in rural areas had the lowest influenza vaccination coverage.

COVID-19 Resources

New: **NIH Community Engagement Alliance Against COVID-19 Disparities**. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) created a collection of online resources with information for communities hit hardest by the pandemic, such as African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and American Indian/Alaska Natives.

We Can Do This: COVID-19 Public Education Campaign. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services announced a national effort to help community partners promote COVID-19 vaccine confidence. The campaign includes educational materials targeted to specific audiences and seeks volunteers for the COVID-19 Community Corps. *New:* Recently added toolkits provide outreach materials for tribal communities and essential workers in agriculture.

Volunteer to Administer COVID-19 Vaccines. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has expanded its definition of persons authorized to give the vaccine. These include, among others, current and retired traditional and non-traditional health care professionals, and students in health care programs.

New: **Facts About COVID Care for the Uninsured**. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) helps uninsured individuals find no-cost COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines. The HRSA Uninsured Program provides claims reimbursement to health care providers generally at Medicare rates for testing, treating, and administering vaccines to uninsured individuals, including undocumented immigrants. There are at-a-glance fact sheets for providers and for patients in English and Spanish.

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 COVID-19-related 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 vaccine locator by state, and **COVID-19 Vaccination Trainings** for new and experienced providers. ***Two new items***: 1) **Provisional death counts by race and urban/rural status**; 2) toolkits with information for **temporary agricultural workers (H-2A visa)** and **employers of H-2A visa workers.**

CMS Coronavirus Partner Resources. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) provides information for providers, health plans, state Medicaid programs, and Children's Health Insurance Programs and holds regular stakeholder calls to provide updates.

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.

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

CDC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Surveillance – extended to May 14 *(from April 25)***.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will make 61 awards, each up to $850,000, for testing and reporting and improving linkages to services. Eligible applicants are state and local governments, and federally recognized Native American tribal governments.

Three Loan Repayment Programs for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) – extended to May 27 *(from May 6)***.** The Health Resources and Services Administration extended the deadline for each of three loan repayment programs: the NHSC Loan Repayment Program, the NHSC Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program, and the NHSC Rural Community Loan Repayment Program. A record number of new awards for eligible clinicians is being supported by an $800 million increase in funding.

NIH/IHS Native American Research Centers for Health – June 24. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) seek applications from federally recognized Tribes and

Tribal organizations. Funding will support biomedical research and efforts to build research capacity for American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

AgriSafe Nurse Scholar Program – **Ongoing until March 1, 2022**. The AgriSafe Network provides this distance learning opportunity for rural nurses to increase knowledge in the prevention, identification, and assessment of injury and illness related to agriculture work. Scholarships are available for nurses working in nonprofit organizations, Rural Health Clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, government agencies, and educational institutions.

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.

Trends in Preterm Births by Rural Status in the U.S. Researchers at the Southwest Rural Health Research Center found data showed that rates for preterm singleton births (the birth of only one child during a single delivery with a gestation of 20 weeks or more) were consistently higher in rural versus urban areas.

Influenza and Pertussis Vaccination Rates Among Pregnant Women in Rural and Urban Areas. The Southwest Rural Health Research Center also present findings that suggest important gains have been made in maternal vaccination, but significant differences persist between rural and urban areas.

Policy Updates

Visit the FORHP Policy page to see all recent updates and send questions to ruralpolicy@hrsa.gov.

*See **Proposed Changes to Medicare Payments to Hospitals** under What's New.*

Learning Events and Technical Assistance

CMS National Campaign: Connecting Kids to Coverage – **Thursday, April 29 at 2:00 pm ET.** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will make mental and behavioral health services the focus of this hour-long webinar on the Children's Health Insurance Program, also known as CHIP. The event is part of CMS' Connecting Kids to Coverage National Campaign.

CMS Nursing Home Stakeholder Call: Infection Control After Vaccination – **Thursday, April 29 at 4:00 pm ET.** On Tuesday of this week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their guidance on controlling COVID-19 infection in health care settings. Experts from the

CDC will provide more details during the National Nursing Home Stakeholder Call held by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence – **April 27-30.** Hosted by the National Health Network on Intimate Partner Violence and Human Trafficking, the three-day conference will conference seeks to advance partnerships between the healthcare field, the anti-violence field, and affiliated social justice movements. HRSA's Office of Women's Health serves on the Steering Committee for this event and CEU/CMEs will be provided.

MATRC: Answering Questions About Telehealth and Telemental Health – **Friday, April 30 at 12:00 pm ET.** The Mid-Atlantic Telehealth Resource Center (MATRC) holds a live, two-hour event to answer questions about the basics. The MATRC is one of 14 FORHP-Supported Telehealth Resource Centers. This is a recurring session taking place every other Friday from 12:00 to 2:00 pm ET.

Meeting of the HHS COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force – **Friday, April 30 at 2:00 pm ET.** The virtual meeting, lasting four hours, is open to the public and will be live-streamed. Pre-registration is required for those who want to provide public comment during the meeting. Public comment without registration may be submitted by emailing COVID19HETF@hhs.gov no later than close of business on Thursday, May 6.

Webinar Series: Medicaid Telehealth Policy – **Friday, April 30 at 2:00 pm ET.** The Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) hosts this series targeted at Medicaid agencies. This series is designed to tackle pressing telehealth policy challenges faced by Medicaid programs and offer medical directors, administrators, and program staff a chance to share lessons learned. Webinars will take place every Friday over a four-week period during Winter, Spring, and Fall 2021 from 2:00 - 3:30pm ET. *See more from CCHP below under Resources of the Week.*

NTIA Series on Broadband Grant Programs – **Wednesday, May 5 at 2:30 pm ET.** The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, will hold a series of webinars to help with applications to three new broadband grant programs authorized and funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021: The Broadband Infrastructure Program, the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, and the Connecting Minority Communities Program. The webinars are 90 minutes each and will occur several times each month through July.

HRSA Community Member Listening Session for Midwest Region – **Thursday, May 6 at 1:00 pm ET.** This session for Midwest Regions 5 & 7 will focus on HIV prevention and care programs for the Ending the HIV Epidemic Initiative.

Report: the Future of Nursing – **Tuesday, May 11 at 3:00 pm ET.** The National Academy of Medicine will discuss findings and recommendations from its report to be released earlier that day. The study explores how nurses can work over the next decade to reduce health disparities, use technology, and lower the cost of care.

HRSA's Women's Health Twitter Chat – **Wednesday, May 12 at 1:00 pm ET.** The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is hosting an hour-long Twitter chat using the hashtag

#HRSAWomensChat during Women's Health Week to share best practices, and lead change to promote healthy women and healthy communities. To participate and to receive a partner packet, email OCsocialmedia@hrsa.gov.

HRSA and National Women's Health Week: Heart Healthy Women – **Wednesday, May 12 at 3:00 pm ET.** HRSA's Office of Women's Health will hold a one-hour session with research-based insights into women's unique cardiovascular health needs, Federal data and resources on women's heart health, and successful strategies from community health centers.

ONDCP Workshop for SUD: Rural Faith-Based Leaders – **Thursday, May 13 at 1:00 pm ET.** The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) will hold a second session (90 minutes) in its series for faith leaders in rural areas. The workshops are meant to increase understanding of substance use disorder (SUD) and provide guidance on connecting faith to prevention, treatment, and recovery. **If you would like to attend, please RSVP** to Betty-Ann Bryce, Special Advisor for Rural Affairs at **MBX.ONDCP.RuralAffairs@ondcp.eop.gov** with your name, title, organization, state/county, and contact information/email address. The Rural Health Information Hub has a recording of the first workshop for faith leaders in its Community Toolbox for SUD.

Resources of the Week

New Topic Guide: Rural Schools and Health. The Rural Health Information Hub provides background, data, and resources for the role that rural schools play in the health of students and their communities.

Telehealth Billing Guide. This guide from the Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) includes information on telehealth billing and reimbursement, current legislation dictating billing requirements, requirements applicable during calendar year 2021 vs. the requirements relevant only during the periods of Public Health Emergency (PHE) extensions, and what may occur post-PHE.   CCHP also released a Telehealth and Medicaid report summarizing telehealth coverage, policies and best practices in the context of the PHE and Medicaid. Several high-level themes emerged based on telehealth case studies from North Carolina, Ohio, Maine, Oklahoma, Virginia, Arizona, Colorado, and Oregon.