

Announcements from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

May 20, 2021

What's New

[CDC: Disparities in COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage Between Urban and Rural Counties.](#) In the latest *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, the CDC collected data on vaccine doses administered across the rural-urban continuum and found that coverage was lower overall, among all age groups, and among men and women in rural compared with urban counties.

[GAO on Maternal Mortality and Morbidity for Rural Areas.](#) The Government Accountability Office (GAO) researches Federal government operations and reports fact-based, non-partisan information. This report notes that data collected for federal maternal health programs isn't always separated and analyzed for rural and underserved areas, and provides an update on recommendations GAO made to the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

[CRS Insight on 5G Fund for Rural America.](#) The Congressional Research Service (CRS) provides objective policy and legal analysis to committees and members of the U.S. House and Senate. This brief describes legislation and activity carried out by the Federal Communications Commission to provide up to \$8 billion over the next 10 years to bring voice and broadband service to rural areas.

COVID-19 Resources

[New: HHS/DoD National Emergency Tele-Critical Care Network.](#) A joint program of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is available **at no cost** to hospitals caring for COVID-19 patients and struggling with access to enough critical care physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists and other specialized clinical experts. Teams of critical care clinicians are available to deliver virtual care through lightweight telemedicine platforms, such as an app on a mobile device. Hear from [participating clinicians](#) and [email to learn more](#) and sign up.

[FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit Program.](#) The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) created this temporary program to help [eligible individuals and households](#) afford internet service during the pandemic. Eligible households can enroll through an approved broadband service provider or by visiting [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](#). The program will end when the fund runs out of money, or six months after the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services declares an end to the COVID-19 health emergency, whichever is sooner.

[HRSA COVID-19 Coverage Assistance Fund](#). The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will provide claims reimbursement at the national Medicare rate for eligible health care providers administering vaccines to underinsured individuals. This may be particularly helpful in rural communities given [higher rates of uninsured and underinsured](#). **New video: [Five Things to Know About the HRSA COVID-19 Assistance Fund](#)**.

[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: [The Rural Communities Toolkit provides resources for building vaccine confidence](#)**.

[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.

[HHS 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. **New: [Resources for Rural Health Clinics](#)**.

[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. **New: [Updated Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 vaccination](#)**, including new guidance for use in adolescents 12 and older.

[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.

[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.

[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:** [The Impact of Rural Residence on COVID-19 Disparities](#).

[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

[USDA Local Food Promotion Program](#) – June 21. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide funding of up to \$750,000 per year for projects support the development or expansion of local and regional food enterprises. Separately, the **[USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) – June 21** funds farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.

[DOJ Family Drug Court Program](#) – June 22. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) will make 19 awards of up to \$1.5 million each to establish or enhance family drug courts, with increased collaboration between substance abuse treatment and child welfare systems. Priority consideration will be given to applications that promote civil rights and serve high-poverty areas.

[DOJ Second Chance Act Adult Re-entry/Recovery Program](#) – June 22. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) estimates 27 awards with total funding of more than \$24 million for training and education programs that help those who are released from prisons and jails return to the community. Priority consideration will be given to applications that promote civil rights and serve high-poverty areas. Separately, the **[DOJ Second Chance Act Pay for Success Initiative](#) – June 22** will invest a total \$6.6 million in six awards for performance-based and outcomes-based contracts for re-entry services and supportive housing.

[DOJ Opioid Affected Youth Initiative](#) – June 28. The U.S. Department of Justice will provide technical assistance and grants of up to \$1.5 million each to help states, local governments, and tribal jurisdictions with a data-driven, community-wide response system for youth affected by opioid use. Eligible applicants include state and local governments, Tribal governments and organizations, public and private institutions of higher education, and nonprofits with 501(c)(3) status.

[HRSA Faculty Loan Repayment Program](#) – July 1. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) awards individuals up to \$40,000 to pay off their qualifying educational loans in exchange for two years of teaching service. Participants also receive a tax liability benefit equal to 39 percent of the loan repayment amount. [Eligible applicants](#) are faculty at an approved health professions school, holding a health professions degree or certificate, and from a disadvantaged background.

[HHS Family-Centered Approaches to Type 2 Diabetes Prevention and Control](#) – July 13. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) expects to make four awards of up to \$1.5 million each to identify effective approaches to diabetes control in racial and ethnic minority populations. Eligible applicants include public and private nonprofits; state, local, and Tribal governments; and institutions of higher education.

[NIH Research Education Programs for Alcohol and Other Substance Use](#) – August 10. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will provide grants to support research educational and outreach activities that complement other formal training programs in the mission areas of the NIH Institutes and Centers, especially the public health impact of alcohol, opioids, and other substances.

[AHRQ Health Services Research Demonstration and Dissemination Grants – Ongoing until September 2022.](#) The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) will support research projects to improve healthcare quality and patient safety, increase access and affordability, and that focus on priority populations, including low-income, minority, women and children, and the elderly.

[HRSA Technical Assistance for Look-Alike Initial Designation for the Health Center Program – Ongoing.](#) The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) helps organizations with their application for [Health Center Program Look-Alike Initial Designation](#). Look-alikes are health centers in medically underserved communities that do not receive Health Center Program funding. Once designated, they may become eligible for several beneficial programs such as the National Health Service Corps, Medicaid and Medicare Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Prospective Payment System (PPS) reimbursement, and HRSA's 340B Federal Drug Pricing Program.

Policy Updates

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

[Guidance to States on Enhanced Federal Funding for Medicaid HCBS.](#) The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance to state Medicaid programs on implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) Additional Support for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) during the COVID-19 Emergency provision. It describes the temporary Federal funding increase for certain HCBS expenditures and describes opportunities for states to strengthen their HCBS systems in response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE), including increasing access to HCBS, protecting the HCBS workforce, and accelerating long-term services and supports (LTSS) reform. Services eligible for temporary increased Federal funding, such as home health care and personal care services, are particularly important in rural areas where [older adults face unique challenges related to COVID-19](#).

Learning Events and Technical Assistance

[Assessment of Opioid Misuse Risk Among Farmers in the Clinical Setting – Friday, May 21 at 1:00 pm ET.](#) The AgriSafe Network will host an hour-long webinar to provide insight on misuse risk factors and warning signs among farmers.

[SAMHSA Connecting Prevention Specialists to Native Communities – Friday, May 21 at 1:00 pm ET.](#) The Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) holds virtual trainings to cover topics such as crisis response, youth engagement, and sexual assault awareness. Trainings will take place on the third Friday of each month.

[HRSA Webinar Series: Vaccine Equity in Action](#) – Wednesday, May 26 at 3:00 pm ET. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is hosting three 90-minute webinars on vaccine equity, each focusing on a population experiencing disparity. The first will focus on the homeless; a session on June 2nd will highlight [migrant seasonal and agricultural workers](#); June 9th will address [Tribal populations](#).

[Stress Issues and Solutions for African American Farmers](#) – Thursday, May 27 at 3:00 pm ET. The nonprofit AgrAbility will discuss stressors unique to African American farm owners and workers during this hour-long presentation.

[MATRC: Answering Questions About Telehealth and Telemental Health](#) – Friday, May 28 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, May 28 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. To provide a public comment during the meeting, send an email with your name and organization to COVID19HETF@hhs.gov no later than close of business on Friday, May 21.

Resources of the Week

[NCSL on Supporting and Sustaining Rural Hospitals](#). A new brief from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) identifies several existing programs on the state and federal levels that can support rural hospitals at high risk of closure.

[Growing Rural Podcast](#). Health and community well-being are the central themes of this series from the South Carolina Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare.
