



## Announcements from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

---

July 1, 2021

### What's New

**[HRSA Payment Program for Buprenorphine-Trained Clinicians.](#)** Yesterday, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) launched an effort to improve access to substance use disorder treatment by paying for clinicians who are cleared to prescribe buprenorphine, [a medication used to treat opioid use disorder.](#) Clinicians working in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) or Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) who have [the waiver necessary to prescribe buprenorphine](#) may be eligible to receive this payment through their employer. Beginning June 30, 2021, FQHCs and RHCs may [apply through HRSA's Electronic Handbook \(EHB\)](#), the agency's online system for managing grants. HRSA will pay \$3,000 for each eligible provider submitted on the application. Existing HRSA grantees should already have an EHB account; for those organizations that are not a grantee, **instructions for creating a new EHB account** can be found under "How to Apply" in the headline link above. There is no deadline to apply, but available funds are limited and will be paid on a first-come, first-served basis. The SUPPORT Act made \$6 million available to FQHCs and \$2 million available to RHCs under this program. HRSA will accept applications and process payments until all available funds are exhausted. For any additional questions about this program, please contact [Data2000WaiverPayments@hrsa.gov](mailto:Data2000WaiverPayments@hrsa.gov).

**[HHS Encourages Enrollment in Marketplace Health Insurance Coverage.](#)** As part of the Rural Week of Action, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) is encouraging [qualified individuals and families](#) to enroll in or change Health Insurance Marketplace plans through August 15, 2021 with the 2021 Special Enrollment Period for COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. More people may [qualify for Marketplace savings](#) that will lower the cost of premiums. It is estimated that [65 percent of uninsured rural adults could have access to a health plan with \\$0 premium](#) on [healthcare.gov](https://healthcare.gov). [Enter your zip code to find local help](#) or call the [Marketplace Call Center](#).

**[HHS Awards Grants for Health Literacy.](#)** The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) awarded funds to local governments in 73 communities as part of an effort to improve the way information is received and understood by racial and ethnic minorities, including those in rural communities. The two-year projects will also focus on other populations considered vulnerable for misperceptions about COVID-19 and other information about public health.

**[NIH Studies Mobile Clinics for Integrated HIV, SUD Treatment.](#)** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched a new clinical trial to determine whether using mobile clinics to treat both HIV and substance use disorder (SUD) at the same time can improve outcomes among individuals who inject drugs.

**[USDA Seeks Public Input on Equity, Racial Justice in Rural Communities](#) – July 15.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is requesting comments – from short feedback on a specific USDA program up to 20 pages of broader research – to inform its Racial Equity Commission that will be launched later this year.

---

## **COVID-19 Resources**

**[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.

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

**[Rural Health Clinic Vaccine Distribution \(RHCVD\) Program.](#)** Under the program, Medicare-certified RHCs will receive direct COVID-19 vaccines in addition to their normal jurisdictions' weekly allocation. Contact [RHCVaxDistribution@hrsa.gov](mailto:RHCVaxDistribution@hrsa.gov) for more information.

**[UPDATED: CARES Act Provider Relief Fund Frequently Asked Questions.](#)** Includes information on terms and conditions, attestation, general and targeted distributions, and how to report capital equipment purchases. Reporting and Auditing requirements FAQs were updated on June 11.

**[Customizable COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Toolkit for Rural Communities.](#)** Easy access to customizable communication templates that include print ads, poster, brochure, social media posts, and an online resource guide.

**[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](#).

**[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, including rural communities, and seeks volunteers for [the COVID-19 Community Corps](#). **New: The campaign launched a Spanish-language website, [JuntosSíPodemos.HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov/juntos-si-podemos).**

**[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.

**[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:** [Statement on Vaccine Side Effects](#).

**[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.

**[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.

**[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.

---

## Funding and Opportunities

**[HRSA Faculty Loan Repayment Program – Extended to July 8 \(from July 1\)](#)**. 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.

**[NEA American Rescue Plan Support for Local Arts Organizations – August 12](#)**. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is a federal agency that supports teaching, learning, and preserving American culture through the arts. As part of the White House plan to stimulate the American economy, the NEA will make grants of up to \$100,000 to eligible, local organizations – including nonprofits, school districts, and art service programs – to pay for day-to-day business expenses and

operating costs. Cultural expression through art is thought to be an agent in [improving social determinants of health](#), and an [aide to mental health and well-being](#).

**[USDA SEARCH – Special Evaluation Assistance for Rural Communities and Households \(for Water/Waste Projects\) – Ongoing](#)**. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services provides grants to eligible communities (population of 2,500 or less) to fund the pre-development costs of proposed water and waste disposal projects.

---

## 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.*

**[The Co-occurrence of HIV and Opioid Mortality in Rural and Urban America from 1999-2018](#)**. The current body of literature outlining connections between HIV and opioid use disorder does not account for differences in rural and urban areas. Using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this brief from the Southwest Rural Health Research Center finds no positive relationship between opioid mortality and HIV mortality over time. Instead, the results show a consistent decline in HIV mortality rates and a troubling rise in deaths from opioids across the time period analyzed.

---

## Policy Updates

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

**[Comments Requested: Proposals to Update Payment Parameters for the 2022 Health Insurance Marketplace – July 28](#)**. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS) seek comments on proposals to update the benefit and payment parameters for Health Insurance Marketplace for the 2022 plan year. Proposals include revising user fee rates, expanding the annual open enrollment period, expanding the Navigator duties, adding a new special enrollment period (SEP), and repealing the Direct Enrollment option, among others.

**[Comments Requested: Proposed Changes to Medicare Home Health Program – August 27](#)**. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) seek public comments on their proposals to update payment rates for the Medicare home health and home infusion services, modify measures reported through the home health quality reporting program, and make permanent selected regulatory blanket waivers related to home health aide supervision that were issued during the COVID-19.

---

## Learning Events and Technical Assistance

**[VA: Disparities in Telehealth Use During COVID-19](#) – Wednesday, July 7 at 1:00 pm ET.** In a one-hour session, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) will examine three sets of factors that account for differences in telehealth use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**[MATRC: Answering Questions About Telehealth and Telemental Health](#) – Friday, July 9 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.

**[ASTHO: Designing HIV Systems for the Margins](#) – Monday, July 12 at 2:00 pm ET.** The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) will discuss promising practices for addressing disparities in HIV care in this hour-long webinar.

**[HRSA: IPV and Maternal Care](#) – Wednesday, July 14 at 11:00 am ET.** The Office of Regional Operations at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) continues its Maternal Health Webinar Series with this hour-long session on [HRSA's Strategy to Address Intimate Partner Violence](#) (IPV) and the barriers preventing access to care.

---

## Resources of the Week

**[Podcast Addresses Political and Religious Sources of Doubt About the COVID-19 Vaccine.](#)** Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health provides some facts about vaccination that may inform conversations about vaccine hesitancy. The interview features a religious perspective as well during a 40-minute podcast on an online radio platform. For more resources like this one, visit [the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships](#) and sign up for their weekly newsletter ([Partnerships@hhs.gov](mailto:Partnerships@hhs.gov)).

**[Identifying and Addressing Social Needs in Primary Care Settings.](#)** The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality created a tool to help primary care practices screen and refer patients for social needs such as food or housing. It will be an additional resource on AHRQ's [Social Determinants of Health site](#).

**[A Primer for Multi-Sector Health Partnerships in Rural Areas and Small Cities.](#)** The tool helps community leaders understand and find opportunities for collaboration between the community development, finance, public health, and healthcare sectors.

---