Announcements from the
Federal Office of Rural Health Policy

April 1, 2021

What's New

American Rescue Plan Includes $6 Billion for CHCs. The sweeping, nationwide plan to recover from the pandemic will invest more than $6 billion in underserved and rural areas through Community Health Centers (CHCs). More than 91 percent of health center patients are individuals or families living at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and more than 60 percent are racial or ethnic minorities.

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: Special Enrollment Period for Health Coverage EXTENDED. Last week, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) announced that the special enrollment period for qualified individuals and families to purchase health insurance in states served by the HealthCare.gov platform has been extended to August 15. Some states run their own health insurance enrollment websites and may or may not make a similar offer. Enter your zip code to find local help.

CHART Model's ACO Track RFA Delayed to Spring 2022. This week, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that the release of the Community Health Access and Rural Transformation (CHART) Model Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Transformation Track Request for Applications (RFA) is delayed until spring 2022. The CHART Model aims to help rural communities transform their health care delivery systems. This delay applies only to the ACO Transformation Track. Applications for the CHART Community Transformation Track are due by May 11, 2021.

HHS Reports on Risk of COVID-19 Infections in Fee-For-Service Medicare. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services points to several factors raising the risk of infections, hospitalization, and deaths. These risks vary across the country, with some geographic areas having higher concentrations of at-risk beneficiaries. This issue brief provides information on risk scores at the national, state, and county level, and includes a database of risk scores by county.

COMING SOON: Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) will make $3.2 billion available to qualifying households to lower the cost of high-speed internet service, providing discounts on internet service bills and an opportunity for a computer or tablet. The EBB program is similar to the Lifeline program with expanded eligibility, vendors, and subsidies. We encourage you to develop a plan now to support patients to apply promptly after the application period is announced by the end of April; funds are expected to go quickly.

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 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 Toolkit for Tribal Communities, and a vaccine locator by state.

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 hosts recurring online sessions to provide updates. *New*: **the Medicare COVID-19 Snapshot** details the latest data on the impact on Medicare beneficiaries, including racial and ethnic minorities, adults 85 years old and older, and people with certain pre-existing conditions.

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

DOJ Services for Victims of Human Trafficking – Extended to April 16. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) will make 27 awards of up to $800,000 each, for direct services to victims of human trafficking. Eligible applicants include state, local, and tribal governments, public housing authorities, and nonprofit organizations, with priority given to rural areas. A separate but related funding notice, **DOJ Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Human Trafficking – Extended to April 16**, will invest $15 million in 25 awards for programs that provide transitional housing and financial assistance.

Pre-Admissions Workshops for AI/AN Students in Health Professions Training/Schools – April 23. The National Center for American Indian Health Professions helps American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) prepare for application to medical school or other advanced health professions program. Selected students must be current high school seniors (18 years or older), current community college or undergraduate students, or recent college graduates.

Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs for the NHSC – May 6. National Health Service Corps (NHSC) programs received an increase of $800 million in funding as part of the American Rescue Plan for pandemic relief (see What's New above). This additional funding will support the largest number of NHSC clinicians in the program's history. There is one application for working health professionals to apply to the NHSC Loan Repayment Program, the NHSC Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program, and the NHSC Rural Community Loan Repayment Program. The NHSC Scholarship Program, which is for eligible medical, dental and nursing students in any year of training, provides up to four years of scholar support. Applications for all programs are due on May 6.

SAMHSA Overdose Treatments for Use by First Responders – May 17. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will make up to 20 awards with total funding of $7.9 million to help first responders administer a drug or device for emergency reversal of opioid overdose. Eligible applicants include state, local, and tribal governments and tribal organizations.

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.

[Post-acute Care Trajectories for Rural Medicare Beneficiaries: Planned versus Actual Hospital Discharges to Skilled Nursing Facilities and Home Health Agencies](#). Post-acute care services are designed to help patients transition from hospitalization in acute care facilities to their homes. Skilled nursing facilities and home health agencies provide the majority of post-acute care services to Medicare beneficiaries. This study from the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center used Medicare administrative data for rural, fee-for-service Medicare beneficiaries to describe post-acute care trajectories following acute hospitalization and examine differences between planned discharge disposition from the hospital and actual post-acute care received.

Policy Updates

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

[CMS Guidance to Resume Hospital Survey Activities](#). As of March 23, 2021, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is lifting the suspension on hospital survey activities, which was put in place due to the public health emergency. Non-immediate jeopardy complaints received during the suspension period will be investigated within 45 days of the memo's release. Hospitals with surveys that ended after January 20, 2021 will have 10 days from the memo's release to develop plans of correction, unless an extension is requested.

[Updated Guidance on Emergency Preparedness Requirements](#). On March 26, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released guidance interpreting the emergency preparedness requirements in the [Burden Reduction Final Rule of 2019](#), which applies to all providers and suppliers. In response to the public health emergency, the guidance also provides best practices, lessons learned, and planning considerations for emerging infectious diseases.

Learning Events and Technical Assistance

[GHPC Community Voices Panel: Shifting Power](#) – Thursday, April 1 at 3:00 pm ET. The Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) holds a 90-minute session with leaders from three communities on shifting power to residents to tackle health-related priorities.

[MATRC: Answering Questions About Telehealth and Telemental Health](#) – Friday, April 2 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](#).

[HRSA Building COVID-19 Vaccine Trust for Patients](#) – Wednesday, April 7 at 1:00 pm ET. The Bureau of Health Workforce at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) invites clinicians, grantees, students, and the public at large to the Clinical Leaders Forum webinar: *Building COVID-19 Vaccine Trust for Community Health Center Patients*.

ASTHO Tackling Inequities in Digital Care Webinar – **Monday, April 12 at 2:00 pm ET.** The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) will hold a 90-minute webinar to present innovations that improve digital equity and potentially lower disparities.

NHLBI: Disease Management Tools for the Underserved – **Wednesday, April 14 at 10:00 am.** The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) is hosting a two-day virtual workshop to discuss barriers to—and opportunities for—improving heart, lung, blood, and sleep health in underserved communities. Participants will discuss how to tailor health monitoring devices and tools that diagnose patients in underserved, low-resource, and remote communities.

NTIA Series on Broadband Grant Programs – **Wednesday, April 14 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 in connection with 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, taking place April – July, are designed to help applicants prepare high quality grant applications.

HRSA: Expanding Rural OUD Treatment via Telehealth – **Thursday, April 15 at 12:00 pm ET.** The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will hold a one-hour session to highlight innovative telehealth for treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD) in rural areas.

Rural Community Health Workers for COVID-19 – **Thursday, April 15 at 1:00 pm ET.** The National Rural Health Association (NRHA), in partnership with the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), will host an hour-long webinar featuring Dr. John Brooks, Medical Epidemiologist from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *See more about rural Community Health Workers below under Resources of the Week.*

Resource of the Week

Opioid and Substance Use Strategies for CAHs. The HRSA/FORHP-funded Flex Monitoring Team has released their archived webinar on opioid and substance use in rural communities. The webinar took place in February to accompany a policy brief published last year. The webinar discusses why Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) should address these issues, provides a framework to support them in this work, and provides examples of activities CAHs are participating in.