Welcome to the new AHA Rural Health Update, where we will be updating you on rural health care news and resources.

Advocacy and Policy

Recap from AHA’s Rural Health Care Leadership Conference
AHA's 33rd annual Rural Health Care Leadership Conference in Phoenix earlier this month brought together more than 1,000 rural hospital and health system leaders and trustees nationwide — the largest number of attendees in the conference's history — to discuss the challenges rural hospitals face, and how rural hospitals and health systems are evolving to meet the needs and demands of an ever-changing health care landscape so that they continue to survive and thrive. Some highlights include:

- AHA Board Chair Melinda Estes, M.D., welcomed attendees and emphasized the need to enact new federal policies and invest in rural hospitals and health systems to help them continue serving their communities for years and decades to come. "The state and strength of rural health care is critical to the fabric of American health care," Estes said. "And it is our singular mission to safeguard it, improve it, expand it, and advance it for future generations."
- AHA President and CEO Rick Pollack hosted a session with Nancy-Ann DeParle, partner and co-founder of Consonance Capital Partners and former assistant to the president and
deputy chief of staff for policy to President Obama; and Lanhee Chen, research fellow at the Hoover Institution and former policy director for the Romney-Ryan presidential campaign. Among other issues, they discussed health care implications for the 2020 election — particularly in rural communities — Medicare for All and the future of the Affordable Care Act.

- In addition, Pollack hosted a session with Erika Rogan, AHA senior associate director of policy, and Travis Robey, AHA senior associate director of federal relations, in which they discussed AHA's 2020 rural advocacy agenda as well as issues Congress will debate this year.
- AHA also presented the AHA Rural Hospital Leadership Team Award to Cody Regional Health in Cody, Wyo. The award recognizes small or rural hospital leaders who guide their hospitals and communities through transformational change on the road to health care reform. AHA also recognized Hill Country Memorial in Fredericksburg, Texas, and Coffey Health System in Burlington, Kan., as finalists. See the AHA news release for more on the winner and finalists.
- AHA kicked off the conference with a new video showcasing rural hospitals and health systems nationwide caring for patients in their communities.

To see full conference coverage, visit our news webpage.

**CMS seeks comments on maternal, infant health care in rural communities**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' Office of Minority Health seeks public input through April 12 on opportunities to improve health care access, quality and outcomes before, during and after pregnancy for women and infants in rural communities. This includes reducing health disparities and racial and ethnic disparities. CMS also seeks input on the readiness of rural providers to respond to obstetric emergencies. The agency will use the responses to inform its programs and policies to ensure rural families have access to high-quality health care that results in optimal health outcomes.

**AHA ads on affordability, rural issues run in early primary states**

The AHA is engaging in early primary states with ads about rural health care and affordability to ensure issues important to hospitals and health systems stay in front of candidates. The AHA's We Care, We Vote webpage contains resources for hospital and health system leaders to use to prepare for the 2020 election. To learn more about AHA's We Care, We Vote initiative, visit wecarewevote.aha.org.

**Resources**

In case you missed them, here's a roundup of some of our latest resources:

**Website: New AHA rural hub with resources and updates**

AHA has refreshed its Rural Health Services webpage, which you can find here. For the latest news on advocacy and policy, tools and resources, case studies and external resources, visit our webpage.

**Blog: Rural health care: Big challenges require big solutions**

Given the trend of rural hospital closures and concerns about access to health care services, most rural health care activity focuses on the here and now. In this blog, AHA's Erika Rogan and Joy Lewis examine the unique challenges facing rural communities and opportunities for the field to improve by creating both short- and longer-term solutions. Read more.

**Podcast: Using artificial intelligence to reach rural patients**

Rachelle Schultz, CEO of Winona Health, talks about clinicians using AI to identify and diagnose illnesses and injuries and recommend customized treatment plans, making primary care more accessible to those isolated by distance, weather or transportation. Listen to the podcast here.
Podcast: Task Force Leader Discusses Rural Challenges, Innovations
Kris Doody, CEO of Cary Medical Center in Caribou, Maine, and chair of the AHA Future of Rural Health Care Task Force, talks with Joy Lewis, AHA vice president of strategic policy, about the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural health care. Listen here.

Podcast: Rural hospital offers flexibility to recruit physicians
Elisa Arespacochaga, vice president of the AHA Physician Alliance, talks with Benjamin Anderson, former CEO of Kearny County Hospital in Lakin, Kan., about how his hospital took a chance on an unorthodox approach to recruit physicians, including offering four-day work weeks and limited on-call commitment. Listen here.

Data and insights: Studies show artificial intelligence and telemedicine pays dividends in rural health
Deploying telehealth in rural areas and elsewhere to deliver care more efficiently while reducing costs and expanding access continues to accelerate. And the evidence is mounting that virtual care is delivering on these promises. Read more in this Market Scan article from AHA’s Center for Health Innovation.

Opportunity: Participate in maternal health quality improvement program
The AHA invites rural hospitals and health systems to participate in the Better Maternal Outcomes Rapid Improvement Network — a free, six-month program focused on maternal outcomes and respectful care. Sponsored by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the network will assist participants in implementing promising practices and improve care delivery for all women and newborns. Participating organizations will learn how to spread best practices and protocols through a variety of shared learning formats. The next session begins in April, and interested hospitals can learn more at ihi.org/maternalhealth. The AHA is partnering with IHI as part of the association’s Better Health for Mothers and Babies initiative.

Funding Opportunities

HRSA funding for SUD services in rural communities
Public and private entities can apply for $1 million grants for a three-year period to enhance or expand opioid and other substance use disorder services in high-risk rural communities, the Health Resources and Services Administration recently announced. The agency expects to award about 89 grants to implement a set of core prevention, treatment and recovery activities that align with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Five-Point Strategy to Combat the Opioid Crisis. HRSA will host a Feb. 25 webinar with more information for applicants. View more.

Apply for Rural Emergency Medical Services training grants
The Rural Emergency Medical Services Training and Equipment Assistance Program received $5 million in appropriation through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services’ Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. SAMHSA is accepting applications for fiscal year 2020 Rural Emergency Medical Services Training grants.

- The purpose of this program is to recruit and train EMS personnel in rural areas, with awards up to $200,000. Applications are due March 30, and the Funding Opportunity Announcement is available here.
- Eligible applicants are rural EMS agencies operated by a local or tribal government (fire-based and non-fire based) and non-profit emergency medical service agencies.
- You can find additional tips for applying for a SAMHSA grant here.

Upcoming Events
AHA Annual Meeting April 19-21 in Washington, D.C.
Register today for the year’s pre-eminent advocacy and public policy conference, where leaders from health care, politics, public policy and the media will discuss the issues that matter most to hospitals and health systems, and the patients and communities they serve. Early bird registration is now open. To register, view meeting details and travel information, visit AnnualMeeting.aha.org.

Events and Education
For the latest updates on events happening, check out AHA’s Events & Education calendar.

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155 N. Wacker, Suite 400, Chicago, IL 60606