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

Coronavirus Update

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began, the American Hospital Association has worked closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal, state and local partners to respond to this challenge to make sure hospitals and health systems have the most up-to-date information. For the latest information and resources, including policy updates, please visit aha.org/COVID19.

President declares national emergency in response to coronavirus outbreak

CMS recently announced several waivers and policy changes to broaden access to telehealth services for Medicare beneficiaries during the COVID-19 public health emergency. CMS also released a Frequently Asked Questions document about the changes included in its announcement. CMS also waived the critical access hospital 25-bed limitation and 96-hour average length of stay
limitation. They waived the skilled nursing facility (SNF) 3-day rule for patients who need to be transferred as a result of the effect of the emergency. See the AHA Coronavirus Update here for more information on telehealth and here for more information on other waivers for CAHs and SNFs.

Advocacy and Policy

AHA-supported bill would renew frontier CAH demonstration for five years
Sens. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and John Hoeven, R-N.D., March 5 introduced AHA-supported legislation (S. 3399) that would renew for five years a demonstration project that tests new models of health care delivery for critical access hospitals in the most sparsely populated states. Launched in 2016, the Frontier Community Health Integration Project aims to better integrate and coordinate care, and reduce avoidable hospitalizations, admissions and transfers to distant providers. Read more.

Final FCC rule released
The Federal Communications Commission released a final rule adopting the framework for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which will allocate funds to establish broadband networks in rural unserved locations. See the final rule here.

CDC: Notice Proposed Data Collection Submitted for Public and Comment Recommendations
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is seeking comment on an information collection for the Injection Drug Use Surveillance Project. The project will assess the drug use risk and prevention behaviors, and the infectious disease consequences of high-risk drug use in rural and urban areas of the United States that have been impacted by the opioid epidemic. Find more information on the proposed information collection project here.

CMS announces key dates for Direct Contracting Model
In response to questions from stakeholders, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recently released a calendar of key dates for the Medicare Direct Contracting Model, which offers two performance-based primary care payment options for hospitals that employ clinicians, critical access hospitals and rural health clinics. The calendar, which is subject to change, also includes important dates for the Medicare Shared Savings Program to help inform participation decisions for applicants interested in both initiatives.

Resources

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

Join our online discussion forum for rural hospital leaders
AHA has launched a member-only, rural hospital digital community for rural executives. This safe-and-secure digital platform has shown its value for sharing best practices and sparking innovation through the collective knowledge and input of rural health care thought leaders from across the nation. To join, visit membercommunity.aha.org. Select the “Log-in” option in the top right corner, and use your email along with your AHA.org password to register. If you have questions, you can contact ahahelp@aha.org or call 800-424-4301.

Podcast: Using Community Health Workers to Expand Access in Rural Areas
On this Advancing Health podcast, John Supplitt, AHA senior director for field engagement, speaks to two rural hospital leaders about the importance of implementing an effective community health worker program to expand health care access. [Listen here.](#)

**Toolkit: Social determinants of health in rural communities**  
Learn how to define, understand, and address social determinants of health and overcome barriers specific to rural areas using RHIhub’s toolkit. [The tool kit](#) assembles resources and model programs that support rural organizations in implementing programs to address social determinants of health in their communities.

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<th><strong>Funding Opportunities</strong></th>
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| **By April 10 – National Organizations of State and Local Officials: Health Care Payment and Financing**  
States and local authorities can apply for this funding, dedicated to preserving and improving public health, building capacity to address other public health matters and support and enforce health regulations, and preventing and suppressing communicable diseases. [Read more here.](#) |
| **By April 13 – HRSA Opioid-Impacted Family Support Program**  
Mental health organizations can apply for funding to support training programs that enhance and expand paraprofessionals knowledge, skills and expertise. This funding aims to increase the number of peer support specialists and other behavioral health-related paraprofessionals who work on interprofessional teams to provide services to children whose parents are impacted by opioid use disorders and other substance use disorders, and their family members who are in guardianship roles. [Read more here.](#) |
| **By April 13 – HRSA Telehealth Network Grant Program**  
Rural or urban nonprofit entities that will provide direct clinical services through a telehealth network are eligible to apply for funding aimed at promoting rural tele-emergency services with an emphasis on tele-stroke, tele-behavioral health, and Tele-Emergency Medical Services. Read more about the opportunity [here.](#) |
| **By April 17 – HRSA Rural Healthcare Provider Transition Project**  
Domestic public or private, non-profit entities can apply for funding to provide technical assistance that will assist eligible small rural hospitals and rural health clinics in strengthening their foundation in key elements of value-based care, including, but not limited to quality, efficiency, patient experience, and safety of care. Read more about the opportunity [here.](#) |
| **By April 23 – National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program**  
Scholarships for students pursuing eligible primary care health professions training in exchange for a service commitment in an approved site in a high-need urban, rural, or frontier community. For information on how to apply, [read here.](#) |
| **By April 24 – HRSA Rural Communities Opioid Response Program-Implementation**  
Domestic public or private, non-profit or for-profit entities, including faith-based and community-based organizations, tribes, and tribal organizations can apply for this funding aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality of substance use disorder, including opioid use disorder, in high-risk rural communities. Read more about the opportunity [here.](#) |
Calling all health care disruptors by May 15

The 2020 AHA Innovation Challenge encourages AHA members to address barriers in the clinical care of people living with psychiatric or substance abuse disorders. Join us by submitting a proposal for improving behavioral health care by May 15. Top three proposals will receive $100,000, $25,000 and $15,000 respectively to help bring their ideas to life. For more information, follow this link.

April 2 webinar for Medicare providers on collecting data for ground ambulance organizations

During this call at 2 p.m. ET, hospitals, critical access hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facilities, hospices and any other Medicare providers will learn how to allocate costs, collect data, and report data for the new Ground Ambulance Data Collection System. Register here.

April 7 webinar on interoperability and patient access final rule call

During this call at 2 p.m. ET, Medicare fee-for-service providers and industry-wide stakeholders will hear about the interoperability and patient access final rule that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services released March 9. Register here.

Unsubscribe from these messages.

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