

## **2027 AHA Rural Hospital Excellence in Innovation Awards**

### **Application Instructions**

The 2027 American Hospital Association (AHA) Rural Hospital Excellence in Innovation Award application period is open. The Award seeks to recognize and amplify the accomplishments of rural hospitals that exemplify responsiveness, innovation, and excellence in developing, implementing and/or sustaining programs and services.

The organization should be advancing and improving programs, care redesign, collaboration, or technology solutions to address emerging health care challenges, ensuring progress in patient and community health and well-being in rural, remote, and frontier areas of the U.S. and territories.

Examples of areas of emerging application of advanced programmatic, care redesign, collaboration, and technology solutions may include, but are not limited to:

- Utilization of telehealth services, wearable patient/consumer technologies, remote patient monitoring systems, and artificial intelligence-powered (AI) platforms used in response to the remote patient and community needs of rural and frontier areas of the country and territories.
- Implementation of advanced cybersecurity measures to protect the integrity of patient information, support systems and devices, and the overall system of care. This may include approaches such as cybersecurity frameworks and collaborations, employee training, vendor requirements and rigor testing, and proactive defense mechanisms against cyber or other intrusive threats.
- Integration of AI to address issues such as access to care, advanced diagnostics, or personalized care in rural hospital setting, workforce shortages, administrative burden, health plan coverage denials or delays, or communication tools to improve patient/consumer health literacy and/or adherence to care plan.

One winner and up to three finalists will be honored at the 2027 AHA Rural Health Care Leadership Conference, Jan. 31 - Feb. 3, 2027, in Orlando. One representative from each honored organization will receive complimentary registration, airfare, and two hotel nights to attend the conference.

## Eligibility

Rural hospitals that are American Hospital Association members in good standing are eligible to apply for this award. For more information on the definition of rural hospitals, please see: [AHA Rural Definition](#).

**Please note:** Only one hospital per health care system is eligible to apply. If your organization is a member of a health care system, please contact system leadership to ensure only one hospital applies from your system.

## Evaluation and Judging

Members of the AHA Rural Health Services Committee review applications and select the winner and finalists. AHA is grateful for the extensive volunteer contributions made by Committee members.

## Requirements

The program or services described in the application must have been operational for a **minimum of 18 months** and have **measurable data to demonstrate the impact and sustainability**.

In addition, honored programs must:

- Identify a key leader willing to participate in a panel discussion at the AHA Rural Health Care Leadership Conference.
- Participate in outreach and education throughout the year.

Applications become AHA property and may be used for best practices and case studies. In these cases, AHA will contact the organization to explore its interest in participating.

## Deadline

Applications are due by **noon Central Time, Tuesday, June 23, 2026**. We are unable to accept late applications.

## Additional Guidance

- Use concise, bullet-pointed responses with clear examples. If a system or mechanism that you have already described as a response to one question is also relevant to another answer, please feel free to refer to the original description rather than repeat it.
- Upload data from the past 18 months with benchmarking comparisons.

## Sponsor

The AHA Rural Hospital Excellence in Innovation Award is sponsored by Microsoft.

**Please note:**

- The application must be submitted through this online platform. Applications and/or supporting documents sent via email will not be accepted.
- Answer all questions marked with an asterisk. If a question doesn't apply, enter "NA."
- Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.
- Submitted applications cannot be modified or edited.
- The application portal closes at **noon Central Time, Tuesday, June 23, 2026**. No extensions will be granted.
- After submission, you will receive a confirmation email. If you don't see it in your inbox, check your clutter/spam/junk folder.
- The confirmation email will include a survey on your experience submitting this application. All responses are anonymous, and they will help us improve the application process.

Contact the AHA Rural Hospital in Excellence Award staff at [ruralaward@aha.org](mailto:ruralaward@aha.org) with questions.

**Begin Your Application**

To begin your application, close this tab. If you applied last year and don't recall your login credentials, please click on Forgot your password to access your account and begin a new application. If you did not apply last year, create an account on the application portal to start, save, and return to your application. Only one account per organization is allowed. When your application is complete, click "Save and Finalize."