

Specialty Innovation Summit Highlights

Rural Health

(Orlando, Fla.)



The American Hospital Association convened hospital and health system leaders at the AHA Rural Health Care Leadership Conference for a human-centered design thinking session to improve health outcomes in rural communities.

This one-page brief highlights the collective insights and priority areas identified by participants, providing organizational strategies for hospitals and health systems to reduce disparities in health outcomes.

Practical Takeaways

1 Prioritize meaningful patient-provider communication and trust.

- Provide ongoing training for clinical and administrative staff in active listening and patient-centered communication, and techniques that foster comfort and confidence with their care team.
- Establish clear organizational patient satisfaction goals and implement routine experience surveys to track progress and identify targeted areas for improvement.
- Host roundtables with community organizations to document care preferences and incorporate community perspectives into organizational planning.

2 Expand capacity for comprehensive, high-quality data collection.

- Implement standardized training sessions to ensure accurate, complete and consistent data collection across the organization.
- Establish multidisciplinary task forces that include community health representatives to champion comprehensive data collection and advocate for patient-centered use of that data.
- Optimize electronic health record systems to capture societal and environmental drivers that influence rural health outcomes, ensuring full alignment with the standards to achieve measurable results.

3 Increase engagement with rural communities facing access barriers.

- Deploy community health workers into geographically isolated areas to extend outreach, build trust and connect underserved residents to care.
- Expand virtual engagement channels to broaden participation and consider tangible incentives — such as priority scheduling or discounted health screenings to encourage ongoing community involvement.

Call to Action:

- **Consider:** How do we define success in patient experiences and how is that translated into measurable performance indicators?
- **Engage:** How can we ensure patient and community voices are included in our quality improvement strategies and organizational planning?
- **Integrate:** Are we effectively using feedback from patients, providers and community partners to identify gaps and drive improvement in rural health outcomes?