

TELLING THE **RURAL HOSPITAL** STORY

American Hospital Association™

Advancing Health in America

www.aha.org/TellingtheHospitalStory

INTRODUCTION

Over 46 million rural Americans depend on their hospital as a crucial source of care. But rural hospitals go beyond just providing medical support to their communities — they are critical to their area's economic and social fabric, providing jobs and economic activity to small towns across the country.

Rural hospitals face many of the same challenges as those in urban and suburban areas: Recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. Caring for sicker, more complex patients. The combination of rising costs and falling reimbursement rates that challenge hospitals' long-term financial stability. But on top of those, rural hospitals must clear the added hurdles of reaching patients who live miles away in areas with no public transportation; working with insular communities in isolated areas; and not necessarily having access to medical technologies or specialists found in other hospitals.

AHA's Telling the Hospital Story highlights hospitals across the country that are serving their communities in extraordinary ways, and rural hospitals are at the forefront. A hospital in Arizona strives to provide culturally-appropriate mental healthcare to the Navajo nation. In Louisiana, a mobile mammography unit reaches women who may not otherwise be able to access this important screening tool. Even large hospitals and health systems are supporting rural hospitals by teaming up to provide support such as training and education, workforce retention strategies, and technology that allows rural Americans to access the latest and best care practices close to home. In short, rural hospitals and health systems must do more with less — and through dedication, grit and especially innovation, they do it every day.



■ ALABAMA

Children's of Alabama

Building a rural network for pediatric behavioral healthcare

Children's of Alabama brings pediatric behavioral health expertise into rural communities through its Pediatric Access to Telemental Health Services (PATHS) program. The initiative equips primary care providers, therapists and school staff with training and resources while using telemedicine to connect children with behavioral health specialists without requiring families to travel long distances.



■ ALASKA

Alaska Native Medical Center

Alaska Native Medical Center connects patients to culture through traditional foods

At Alaska Native Medical Center, traditional food is more than a menu item. The hospital's Traditional Tuesdays program serves traditional foods — like harbor seal — to not only improve patients' physical health but also provide emotional and cultural healing.



■ ARIZONA

Navajo Health Foundation — Sage Memorial Hospital

Culturally-rooted mental healthcare for the Navajo nation

At Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado, Ariz., Richard Laughter, M.D. — the only Navajo psychiatrist serving the vast Navajo Nation — is bridging cultural and access gaps in behavioral healthcare by blending Native traditions with Western medical practices. Drawing on shared cultural understanding and personal experience, Dr. Laughter provides care that feels relatable and reassuring for patients who face significant barriers to mental health services.

■ ARKANSAS

Arkansas Children's Hospital

Virtual expertise helps rural hospitals take on complex pediatric heart scans

A child in rural Arkansas no longer has to travel hours to Little Rock just to get specialized heart imaging. Arkansas Children's Hospital is using telemedicine to enable pediatric cardiac experts to work virtually alongside rural care teams as they perform MRI and CT scans, helping local hospitals produce the detailed images specialists need while keeping children closer to home.

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■ GEORGIA

Mercer Health

Increasing access to pediatrics in rural Georgia

With roughly half of Georgia's rural counties lacking a pediatrician, Mercer University School of Medicine needed a solution to close the gap. A partnership with a large system is strengthening pediatric care at rural hospitals, connecting isolated physicians with specialists through telehealth, expanding behavioral health support and offering scholarships to encourage more doctors to build their careers in rural communities.

■ INDIANA

Reid Health

Using AI to improve care, patient satisfaction and workforce retention

At Reid Health, AI is helping clinicians spend less time on documentation and more time with patients. The technology has cut 10-12 minutes from the average clinical note, boosted same-day completion to 86% and contributed to stronger patient satisfaction and workforce retention. It also garnered Reid Health finalist recognition for the 2026 Rural Healthcare Excellence in Innovation Award.



■ IOWA

Virginia Gay Hospital

Simulation on wheels brings critical training to EMS teams

Three mobile simulation trucks are bringing hands-on emergency training to rural hospitals and EMS teams across Iowa, allowing clinicians to practice high-risk situations they may rarely encounter. The SIM-IA program has visited all 99 counties in the state and is helping teams work through situations as varied as pediatric trauma, difficult airways and obstetric emergencies, while a new investment will expand training in rural communities and maternal care deserts.

■ KANSAS

University of Kansas Health System

A small college and a big university create new pathways to the rural workforce

Rural Kansas needs more healthcare workers, and two local institutions are teaming up to help fill the gap. McPherson College and the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Salina are creating new pathways for students to explore rural medicine through hands-on experiences, mentorship, research and guaranteed admission opportunities. The goal is to inspire more future healthcare workers to build their careers in rural communities.

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■ LOUISIANA

Woman's Hospital

A mammography bus takes cancer screening on the road

Woman's Hospital in Baton Rouge is taking breast cancer screening beyond the hospital walls with a new mobile mammography coach equipped with 3D imaging technology. The program reached nearly 5,000 women last year through stops at schools, churches and community centers across Louisiana and Mississippi, bringing potentially lifesaving screenings to women who might otherwise face barriers to care.



■ MARYLAND

University of Maryland Medical System

A new program trains med students in rural health

Maryland's Eastern Shore faces a persistent shortage of physicians, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine is taking a long-term approach to building the local healthcare workforce. A new program will train medical students in the realities of rural care, with plans to place 10 physicians a year in Eastern Shore communities.



■ MISSOURI

University of Missouri Health Care

Taking emergency training to rural hospitals

Clinicians in rural communities may have fewer opportunities to practice complex emergency skills. The Missouri School of Medicine is bringing simulation training directly to rural hospitals, using mobile units with lifelike mannequins to help nurses and other providers prepare for rare, high-pressure emergencies without leaving their communities.

■ MONTANA

Rosebud Health Care Center

Telemedicine helps a Montana hospital keep medications within reach

In tiny Forsyth, Mont., Rosebud Health Care Center is using telemedicine to solve a very practical rural health challenge: making sure patients can get their medications around the clock. Through its eCARE Pharmacy program, clinicians can consult with a pharmacist remotely and dispense prescriptions through an automated system, giving the community 24/7 pharmacy support without the cost of staffing a full-time pharmacist locally.

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■ NEW MEXICO

Presbyterian Espanola Hospital

A new approach to mental health and addiction care

Presbyterian Española Hospital is rethinking how rural communities can reach people struggling with mental illness and addiction by starting treatment in the emergency department and using peer counselors and case managers to help patients stay connected to care. The New Mexico hospital is also exploring ways for paramedics and homeless shelters to help deliver medication, addressing two of the biggest obstacles patients face: getting to treatment and affording the medications they need.

■ NEVADA

Renown Health

Training tomorrow's OB/GYNs in rural Nevada

Northern Nevada is getting a new pipeline for OB/GYN physicians as Renown Health and the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine launch the region's first residency program. The first class of three residents will begin in 2027, with the program aimed at keeping newly trained doctors in Nevada and improving access to maternity and reproductive healthcare, particularly in rural communities where more than half of the state's counties lack routine labor and delivery services.

■ NEW YORK

Clifton-Fine Hospital

Facing closure, a hospital expands instead

Facing the possibility of closure, Clifton-Fine Hospital in New York's Adirondacks took a different path, investing in a new emergency department and becoming the state's first Rural Emergency Hospital. The facility gives the small hospital more room, updated technology and expanded services, helping ensure patients in their community can continue to receive care.



■ NORTH CAROLINA

Scotland Health

Community health workers and paramedics team up to reduce readmissions

Scotland Health pairs community health workers with paramedics who make house calls across rural North Carolina. The home-based program, which was recognized as a 2026 AHA Rural Hospital Excellence in Innovation Award finalist, has helped cut hospital readmissions and emergency visits while improving maternal care and addressing everyday obstacles such as transportation, food and housing.

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■ OKLAHOMA

INTEGRIS Health

A mobile clinic takes preventive care where residents need it most

INTEGRIS Health is taking preventive care directly into Oklahoma City neighborhoods where transportation, long waits and other barriers can make routine healthcare difficult to access. Its Mobile Health Clinic combines screenings and chronic disease management with case management, health education and even cooking demonstrations, while partnerships with food banks and community groups help address the broader needs affecting residents' health.

■ OREGON

Columbia Memorial Hospital

Building access to care through collaboration

Columbia Memorial Hospital has built a long-standing partnership with Oregon Health & Science University to bring specialty care closer to home for rural patients. The collaboration has expanded access to cancer care, cardiology, endocrinology and pulmonology, while a major hospital expansion will add services, attract providers and bring new technology to the community.

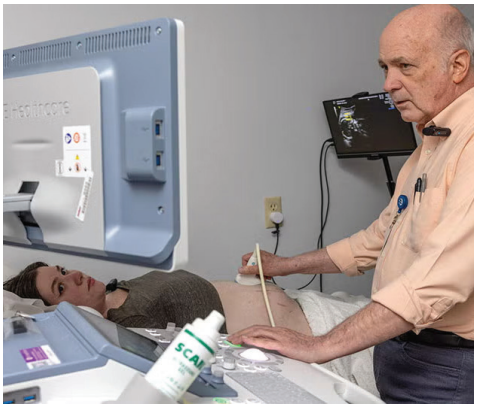


■ PENNSYLVANIA

Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health

A longstanding effort to provide care to the Amish community

Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health has built strong relationships with Amish families by tailoring healthcare outreach to the community's culture and transportation needs. Through accessible clinics, safety education and community partnerships, LG Health works to reduce illness and injuries among Amish families in Lancaster County.



■ SOUTH DAKOTA

Sanford Health

Flying the extra mile for rural maternal health

For women with high-risk pregnancies in some of South Dakota's most remote communities, getting specialized care can mean a long trip — or no care at all. Sanford Health maternal-fetal medicine specialist Michael McNamara flies each week from Sioux Falls to Rapid City, while the health system's aircraft support 60 types of specialty outreach at more than 200 locations across the Upper Midwest.

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■ TENNESSEE

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Rural nurses receive training to assist survivors of sexual assault

Survivors of sexual assault in rural Tennessee who wanted trauma-informed care had to make a long and difficult trip away from home. Vanderbilt University Medical Center used a federal grant to train 90 Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners who have special training in treating victims, including administering trauma-informed forensic exams. Now survivors can receive the care they need in their communities.

■ TEXAS

Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Stephenville

Expanding support for patients with chronic lung disease

In rural Erath County, patients living with COPD, asthma and other chronic breathing problems now have access to specialized rehabilitation closer to home. Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Stephenville's 12-week program combines exercise with breathing techniques, nutrition guidance and emotional support, with the goal of helping patients manage their conditions and avoid repeat hospital stays.

■ VERMONT

Brattleboro Memorial Hospital

Paramedics provide at-home support for surgical, chronic patients

Brattleboro Memorial Hospital brings care into patients' homes through a mobile program that pairs paramedics with clinical teams to support patients before and after surgery and help them manage chronic conditions. The approach has helped reduce unnecessary trips to the hospital while giving patients more support at home — and earned the hospital recognition as a 2026 AHA Rural Health Excellence in Innovation Award finalist.



■ WEST VIRGINIA

WVU Medicine Potomac Valley Hospital

From closure to comeback: A rural ICU is reborn

WVU Medicine Potomac Valley Hospital's ICU sat closed for 18 months before the 25-bed critical access hospital partnered with a larger health system to launch a low-cost virtual ICU, helping keep patients closer to home while giving clinicians added support. For its innovative approach to rural healthcare, Potomac Valley Hospital received the AHA's Rural Hospital Excellence in Innovation Award.



WYOMING

Evanston Regional Hospital

A new approach keeps prenatal care closer to Wyoming families

When Evanston Regional Hospital's labor and delivery unit closed, expectant mothers in southwestern Wyoming were left facing long drives for routine prenatal care. Intermountain Health Utah's new Maternal Health Connections program is helping close that gap with virtual monitoring, mental health support, genetic counseling and substance use services, while nurses work with each patient to develop a personalized birth and postpartum plan.

■ WISCONSIN

Amery Hospital

■ COLORADO

Lincoln Health

■ MICHIGAN

Mackinac Straits Health System

Rural hospitals get creative to recruit and retain workers

Rural hospitals are getting creative about building a workforce that can stay and grow with their communities. These three hospitals have enacted innovative programs including flexible schedules, employee wellness programs, medical assistant apprenticeships, scholarships and partnerships with schools.

