



National Rural Health Association

RURAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION FOUNDATION

How You Can Help 62 Million Rural Americans

The facts

The national situation commands urgent attention. Today, more than 62 million rural Americans – including an astonishingly diverse 1.3 percent of the American workforce on two million farms that feed much of the world depend nearly exclusively on a broad spectrum of critical health care services.

A wide and complex variety of clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, behavioral health professionals, dentists, optometrists, and more make up that diverse continuum. Rural hospitals, critical access hospitals, rural health clinics, and other facility-based operations function as the social and economic engines behind life-enhancing and lifesaving health care. Sustaining the viability and continued operations of these vital services is nothing short of paramount.



The devastating rural toll of the pandemic underscores the critical need for rural health transformation. Just when every ER and ICU – and even basic health care services – are needed more than ever in rural America, more than 136 rural hospitals have shut their doors over the past decade. Today, rural America faces a grim reality: **one in every three remaining rural hospitals is considered at risk.** Clinics and speciality practices also weigh in this precarious balance – but there is hope to set matters aright. Given the magnitude of this crisis, **your support is urgently needed to accelerate a viable solution** to help current and next-generation rural health care continues to survive and thrive across all sectors.

What happened?

In a word, rural health care is different. Health care delivery in rural areas and small towns faces a whole set of different issues from urban health care centers, including higher injury and death rates for farmers and

rural remote workers and higher rates of comorbidity situations. In short, upholding high standards in public health is tough. Facing a deadly pandemic only heightened rural disparities. The fact remains that social, cultural, economic, and workforce differences in rural areas can and do complicate consistent health care delivery. **A core issue?** These complications emerge in ways that newly trained health care professionals may not be fully prepared for.

The latter issue represents an ongoing challenge that has impacted rural health care delivery for more than a decade. Over the past 10 years, faced with burgeoning costs, talent scarcity, regulatory burdens, and serious compensation issues, many rural health care facilities struggled to maintain services and keep their doors open. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the first of several staggering blows fell with a near-universal ban on elective procedures, long a revenue-enhancing staple of rural hospitals.



Many more complications followed, all at a time when every frontline professional was needed 24/7. As rural hospitals labored under tight constraints, these issues bled over to the broader scope of rural health. Financial conditions continued to mercilessly deteriorate. Some improvements have been achieved, but much more is needed.

Thankfully, strategic and effective opportunities exist to slow and even reverse this alarming situation.

Who are we?

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is a demonstrated and true rural champion, setting a high standard in supporting and helping to sustain quality health care for rural Americans. NRHA, through the Rural Health and Leadership Education Foundation and related programs, supports and funds short- and long-term strategic solutions for rural health care, whether inside a rural hospital or among industry professionals directly supporting rural public health.

Many rural health care operations confront external political and industry barriers but do not effectively navigate these challenges. The key to success depends on the quality and depth of executive leadership. NRHA, in partnership with the Center for Rural Health Leadership and other professionals, offers proven training and certification programs to furnish current and next-generation leaders with tools needed to elevate and sustain rural health care delivery and health equity.

Through two distinct programs, NRHA directly and actively supports emerging leaders for rural communities. **First**, given that health quality and equity are often determined outside the walls of a rural hospital or clinic, NRHA and the Rural Health and Leadership Education Foundation support the **Rural Health Fellows Leadership Program**, a year-long intensive training program that develops rural health leaders who will step forward to serve in key positions in NRHA, affiliated rural health advocacy groups, and local and state legislative bodies. The proven program aims to further increase the diversity of rural health leaders by encouraging applications from individuals focused on health equity for rural communities. **Second** (but equally important), given that rural hospitals are rural anchor institutions (from social, cultural, and economic perspectives, as well as health

care), NRHA and the Rural Health and Leadership Education Foundation directly support and fund **high-impact hospital specialty leadership training** through the Center for Rural Health Leadership.

Making a critical difference

Of course, university-based public health programs serve a critical role in preparing future leaders. But experience shows that emerging leaders require actionable insight into critical issues like successfully working with local hospital boards and elected officials, or how to marshal support from county commissioners and other key local influencers. To elevate real community success, rural hospital CEOs and other C-level leaders must develop personalized networking, managerial, and strategic abilities that enable them to fulfill the unique role of leading a rural hospital or clinic. This capacity

anticipates and addresses issues like the fact that a rural health care operation probably doesn't have the economic, fiscal, workforce, and related resources of a much larger urban facility. Professionals across the rural health landscape must also possess innovative leadership qualities to promote success and long-term viability.

The key fact? *Quality, depth, and experience of executive leadership remains the most accurate predictor of rural hospital success.* The time has come to step up and ensure that

key executives possess the leadership skills necessary to strengthen rural hospitals threatened with rapidly evolving challenges.

The need for the in-depth training offered through these partnerships is immediate and critical. Your essential support will help provide scholarships and other funding required to enhance vital executive rural training in leadership, operations, finance, and clinical fields.

What's next?

Here's the critical consideration: Only slightly more than 1,800 rural hospitals exist to serve approximately 62 million rural Americans. Some are reasonably strong. Many were ravaged by the pandemic economy and face a brittle, high-risk future without innovative and insightful leadership. Many professionals directly impact the broad spectrum of rural health care services. They all need high-quality, insightful leadership to survive.





How rural America can get help

The need is critical and real. As a first step, the Rural Health and Leadership Education Foundation plans to raise an initial \$1 million over the next two years. These funds will jumpstart and expand the vital education of key leaders. Professionals emerging from these programs will be equipped to improve the viability of rural healthcare operations. The focus of these expanded programs will help reduce/eliminate financial distress, elevate the success of key talent attraction, and help create a new generation of high-performing rural health care facilities. **With your assistance, we can help pull rural health care back from the brink.**

How important is this? Too many states already have vast areas officially designated as medically under-served. To effectively provide much-needed dynamic services, current and future health care leaders must be well versed in organizational leadership skills, regulatory fulfillment, compliance and risk management, changing insurance demands, critical cybersecurity issues, revenue, budgetary and capital planning, and the safety and quality standards of clinical practice.

There's no need to waste time developing these programs. Established high-performing certification and position-specific dedicated training programs are already available for future and current hospital Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Chief Nursing Officers. The NRHA's Rural Health Fellows Leadership program complements this focus by directly engaging emerging leaders through an accelerated training that focuses on a network of diverse rural health leaders. Fellows participating in this program learn how to navigate policy at national, state, and local levels, with a specific focus on health equity to ultimately promote and create positive outcomes for rural communities.

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Participants in these programs will be empowered and equipped to lead rural hospitals and other rural health care services to thrive – not just survive. Those who complete the established curriculum will possess enhanced capacity to help improve the quality of life in rural America by effectively leading their hospitals, clinics, practices, and yes, their communities to promote and create a culture of wellness.

How you can be part of the solution

The proven and tested curriculum, instructors, and delivery systems are already in place. Providing critical scholarships and funding will promote change and help make an immediate difference.

With your generous and strategic support, NRHA will be empowered to help transform a generation of rural health care leadership, reduce the risk of future catastrophic rural hospital closures, and elevate the effective delivery of high-quality health care to 62 million rural Americans, including that diverse 1.3 percent of the American workforce that feeds much of the world.

Quality of health and even lives are at stake. The people of rural America need your help now. Please help us reach our initial goal of \$1 million, which will fund scholarships and training for future executives in both the Center for Rural Health Leadership and the NRHA Rural Health Fellows program. Pledges and commitments are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. By making a financial commitment today, you will directly help ensure the delivery and training of high-performing rural health care executives for the next generation. You will improve health care delivery and availability across a critical landscape — and help save lives.

Devastating rural hospital closures and public health decline can be prevented. **Join us today to make a critical difference.**

