



Health and
Human Services

Bureau of Rural and Community Health Programs and Opportunities

Division of Public Health
Rural and Community Health

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For contact information, visit
<https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/rural-health>



Who We Are

The Rural and Community Health Bureau programs are located within the Division of Public Health at the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS). These programs address healthcare issues affecting Iowa's rural and local communities.

The Rural and Community Health Bureau programs promote access to quality healthcare for all Iowans through healthcare infrastructure planning and development, systems building and addressing barriers affecting access to quality healthcare.

Rural Health in Iowa

Over a third of Iowans reside in rural communities which are wonderful places to work, live and raise families. These areas are known for friendly neighborhoods, sense of community, and willingness of its residents to help each other.

Rural communities have unique healthcare challenges that affect access to care, such as workforce shortages and increased number of people who are uninsured or under-insured. Furthermore, aging population dynamics and associated health challenges also contribute to the complexity of the healthcare landscape.



Rural and Community Health Bureau programs include:

- ▶ Centers of Excellence Program
- ▶ Community Health Worker Initiative
- ▶ Direct Care Worker Initiative
- ▶ Iowa Community Corps AmeriCorps Program
- ▶ Iowa Healthcare Workforce Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Engagement Initiative
- ▶ Iowa Prescription Drug Donation Repository Program (SafeNetRx)
- ▶ J-1 Visa Waiver Program
- ▶ Medical Residency and Fellowship Programs
- ▶ Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program (Flex)
- ▶ Mental Health Training Program
- ▶ Physician National Interest Waiver Program
- ▶ Primary Care Provider Loan Repayment Program
- ▶ Primary Care Office Program
- ▶ Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP)
- ▶ State Office of Rural Health Program
- ▶ Volunteer Health Care Provider Program

Workforce Recruitment and Retention Programs

Centers of Excellence Program

Centers of Excellence are innovative care models that specialize in specific areas of medicine, offer a variety of services and treatments and create regional access to specialty care especially in rural areas where access is lacking.

This program will demonstrate regional collaboration to assess targeted medical needs of local residents and establish partnerships to leverage resources and develop a business model for long-term sustainability. Iowa currently has five Centers of Excellence projects:

- 📍 **Grinnell Regional Medical Center**
(Iowa, Marshall, Poweshiek, Tama)
- 📍 **St. Anthony Regional Hospital**
(Audubon, Calhoun, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Sac)
- 📍 **Cass Health**
(Adams, Adair, Audubon, Cass, Montgomery)
- 📍 **Mahaska Health**
(Jefferson, Appanoose, Davis, Iowa, Jasper, Keokuk, Lucas, Mahaska, Marion, Monroe, Poweshiek, Van Buren, Wapello, Washington)
- 📍 **Van Buren County Hospital**
(Van Buren, Davis, Jefferson, Lee)

Community Health Worker Initiative

A community health worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of the community and has a very strong understanding of the population being served. CHWs serve people often in their shared language, ethnicity, life experiences, and socioeconomic status. These connections help break down barriers and build relationships and trust. Inclusion of CHWs has been shown to improve outcomes, advance equity, and reduce care costs.

Iowa CHW Alliance

Iowa HHS recognizes the impact Iowa's CHW workforce could have in addressing some of the barriers rural Iowans face. To advance and support this workforce, the Iowa CHW Alliance was created. The Iowa CHW Alliance offers guidance and information helpful in raising awareness and encouraging utilization of Iowa's

CHW workforce. They also play a role in garnering stakeholder support and exploring sustainability opportunities.

Iowa's CHW Training Grant

In September 2022, Iowa HHS was awarded a federal CHW Training Grant to train CHWs across the state. This grant focuses on three training opportunities.

- CHW Professional Skills Training- a 30 hour virtual, on-demand training for those interested in becoming a CHW.
- CHW Registered Apprenticeship- a U.S. Department of Labor approved apprenticeship with on the job and classroom learning for those currently working as a CHW.
- Public Health Training for CHWs- a 10-12 hour virtual, on-demand training for current CHWs to gain additional public health training.

Direct Care Worker Initiative

The Direct Care Workforce is an umbrella name for the 78,000-strong workforce in Iowa. Direct Care Workers are defined as individuals who provide supportive services and care to people experiencing health conditions, illnesses, or disabilities and receive compensation for such services.

They may work in home-based, community-based, or facility settings. Through state funding, Iowa HHS has established a contract through an RFP process with Iowa CareGivers to provide education, outreach, and leadership development to strengthen Iowa's direct care workforce.

Contracts are also established with the University of Iowa to collaborate, maintain and promote **Prepare to Care**, Iowa's Direct Care and Support Curriculum to train Direct Care Workers to work in a variety of settings.



Iowa Community Corps

AmeriCorps Program

The Iowa Community Corps is a Public Health AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps members are placed for service at community-based organizations to support capacity building projects that expand food security and resource navigation in Iowa communities.

AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance and education award for their service, while gaining networking opportunities, skills, and professional development to lead a successful career in public health. A key professional development opportunity is the Community Health Worker Professional Skills Training, which is available to members that complete a minimum of 450 hours of service.



Iowa Healthcare Workforce Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Engagement Initiative

Iowa communities face challenges recruiting and retaining the workforce population, especially for healthcare. Iowa HHS has an initiative to complete a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process for Iowa's healthcare workforce.

The goal of this project is to use input from local communities and healthcare workforce stakeholders to identify actionable solutions that will advance Iowa's healthcare workforce.

This initiative has created the **Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Strategic Action Plan**. The Strategic Action Plan includes four goal areas: recruitment, training and education, retention and sustainability.



Iowa Prescription Drug Donation Repository Program

Iowa Prescription Drug Donation Repository Program, or SafeNetRx, provides affordable medication access to Iowans in need of assistance.

Through this program, Iowans in need of assistance may receive medications and medical supplies at little or no cost.



J-1 Visa Waiver Program

The J-1 visa waiver program allows J- visa exchange visitors to apply for a waiver of the two-year home residency requirement upon completion of their exchange program.

The Primary Care Office (PCO) receives requests and provides letters of support for physicians who agree to the three-year full-time service commitment. Physicians must provide primary care or specialty care in a designed primary care health professional shortage area, or a medically underserved area or population; or provide psychiatric care in a mental health professional shortage area.



Medical Residency and Fellowship Support Grants

Medical Residency Training State Matching Grants Program designates state funding to support the expansion of Iowa-based residency positions. Hospitals, schools, or consortiums located in Iowa that are financially responsible for an accredited medical education residency program may apply for funding to establish a new or alternative campus-accredited program for the provision of a new residency position or to fund residency positions in excess of the federal residency cap.

The **Psychiatry Residency Training Program** designates state funding to support the expansion of psychiatry residency spots of established accredited programs in Iowa.

The **Family Medicine Obstetrics Fellowship Program** designates state funding to meet the critical demand for well trained family medicine obstetrics practitioners in rural and underserved areas in the state.



Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Program

The Flex Program allows small hospitals to be certified as critical access hospitals (CAHs) and seeks to help implement initiatives to strengthen rural health infrastructure.

In addition to certifying hospitals as CAHs, eligible CAHs may participate in flex funded activities and opportunities to support quality improvement, financial and operational improvement, and population health.

Quality Improvement

The Quality Improvement area includes Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP) data. Submitting MBQIP data is the only requirement for CAHs to be able to also participate in the Financial & Operational and Population Health areas of Flex.

The Flex Quality Improvement Contractor sends MBQIP reports to hospitals and provides technical assistance, webinars/calls, and live events related to quality improvement. Starting in calendar year 2025, hospitals will collect data to report on the updated MBQIP core measure set as part of the Flex Program.

MBQIP Core Measures include 12 measures across the following categories:

- ▶ Global Measures
- ▶ Patient Safety
- ▶ Patient Experience
- ▶ Care Coordination
- ▶ Emergency Department

MBQIP requirements are based on submission of data in the following MBQIP domains.

- ▶ National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN)
- ▶ Emergency Department Transfer Communication (EDTC)
- ▶ Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS)
- ▶ Hospital Quality Reporting (HQR) System



CAHs can participate in these activities if quality improvement requirements are met:

Population Health

Population Health provides technical assistance for 501(c)3 CAHs in completing the IRS required Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and Implementation plan every three years. Educational webinars, technical assistance, peer assistance, and collaborative learning cohorts are provided to assist hospitals in building capacity to identify and address community needs in an effort to improve health outcomes for rural communities.

Financial and Operational

Improvement Financial and Operational Improvement provides hospitals with educational webinars, triage resources, live trainings and meetings, comparative dashboards, an in-depth revenue cycle assessment cohort and action planning, an operational excellence learning collaborative, and peer assistance.



For more information, scan the QR code to visit <https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/rural-health/rural-hospital-programs>

Mental Health Training

Psychiatry Training Program for Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners Program is a state-funded program that supports the advanced mental health training of physician assistants and nurse practitioners matriculating through an established, accredited program in Iowa.

NAMI Provider Education Program is a state-funded program that supports the delivery of National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) Provider training to students enrolled in a degree specializing in a primary care discipline (family medicine, general internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, geriatrics, or general pediatrics), pharmacy program, or nursing program.

Psychologist Internship Program is a state-funded program to expand and improve the psychologist workforce engaged in mental health treatment and services to Iowans, including underserved populations and Medicaid members. The program rotates intern psychologists at practice sites that are located within a federally designated mental health professional shortage area.



Physician National Interest Waiver Program

A Physician National Interest Waiver (PNIW) allows foreign national physicians seeking a Green Card via the second-preference employment category (EB-2) to waive the job offer and labor certification requirement.

In exchange, the physician must agree to a full-time, five-year service obligation either in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA), Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA – for psychiatrists only), Medically Underserved Population (MUP), or Medically Underserved Area (MUA). The Primary Care Office receives requests for and provides PNIW attestation letters throughout the year for primary care and specialty physicians.



Primary Care Provider Loan Repayment Program

The **Primary Care Provider Loan Repayment Program** provides educational loan repayment assistance in exchange for a minimum two year service obligation at an eligible practice site(s) located in a federally designated health professional shortage area that corresponds to the provider's discipline.

The Primary Care Office receives applications and makes awards through an annual competitive application process.



Primary Care Office

The Primary Care Office (PCO) works to enhance access to healthcare and mitigate unmet healthcare needs primarily for rural and underserved populations.

The PCO Program supports several tools including the Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Connection website, the 3RNET job board, and Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA).

Visit the Rural and Community Health Bureau website for additional information



For more information, scan the QR code to visit

<https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/rural-health/primary-care-office-and-state-office-rural-health-programs>



Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Connection



The Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Connection is a website devoted to healthcare workforce recruitment and retention in rural Iowa. The website includes healthcare job opportunities, as well as rural workforce announcements, tools, and publications. Visit www.iowaruralworkforce.org

3RNET



3RNET is a non-profit organization specializing in healthcare jobs in rural and underserved communities. The online job portal is available at www.3RNet.org

Health Professional Shortage Area & Medically Underserved Designations



Shortage and Medically Underserved designations support recruitment and retention of rural primary care providers in Iowa. There are four types: Health Professional Shortage Areas, Iowa Governor's Designation for Rural Health Clinics, Medically Underserved Areas, and Medically Underserved Populations.

Shortage designations consist of whole county designations, groupings of townships or census tracts within a singular county, and groupings of townships or census tracts across counties. The Primary Care Office participates in shortage designation application and review.

Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP)

The SHIP Program provides funding to support hospital activities in key focus areas that include:

- 1.** Value-based purchasing for activities such as improving data collection to facilitate reporting to Hospital Compare.
- 2.** Payment bundling for activities such as building accountability across the continuum of care.
- 3.** Accountable care organizations for activities such as improving quality outcomes in rural communities.
- 4.** The Prospective Payment System (PPS) for activities such as maintaining accurate PPS billing and coding.



To participate, hospitals must meet Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP) participation requirements and complete ICD-11 coding readiness activities. Once requirements are met, hospitals may choose other approved areas of funding.



For more information, scan the QR code to visit <https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/rural-health/rural-hospital-programs>

State Office of Rural Health (SORH)

The SORH program is a unique federal-state partnership that empowers rural communities and organizations by identifying and resolving critical healthcare challenges and strengthening rural health infrastructure. The SORH provides consultation to rural Iowa communities and healthcare providers regarding federal, state, and rural health program participation. Additionally, it collects and disseminates data and resources for rural communities.



Volunteer Health Care Provider Program (VHCPP)

The VHCPP supports volunteerism by offering defense and indemnification protection to eligible healthcare providers and clinics that provide free healthcare services.

To be eligible, an individual volunteer must hold an active unrestricted Iowa license, registration, or certification to practice in Iowa in an eligible discipline. An eligible clinic is a field dental clinic, free clinic, or specialty health care provider office providing free care.



Volunteer providers and clinics must have a signed agreement with the Iowa Health and Human Services to participate in the VHCPP.

Additionally, a protected clinic holding a current protection agreement with the VHCPP shall be afforded defense and indemnification protection as an agency of the state.



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The Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services Flex Cooperative agreement of \$871,770 provided full financial support for this publication (or booklet). The contents are those of the author. They may not reflect the policies of the Department of Health and Human Services or the U.S. government.