



November 13, 2025

Alina Czekai  
Director  
Office of Rural Health Transformation  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
7500 Security Blvd.  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Director Czekai,

Given the historic opportunity to transform rural health provided by the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), we write to underscore the urgency of aligning this program with the pillars and strategic insights outlined in the [Future of Rural Health Summit Report](#).<sup>1</sup> The Summit Steering Committee offers this ongoing work as a resource throughout RHTP implementation.

The RUPRI (Rural Policy Research Institute) Health Panel, the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) and West Health held a facilitated convening of 42 national rural health experts in November 2024 to identify the needs of rural health communities, build on existing strengths, and develop a cohesive approach to improving the health of rural Americans through policy. The Summit discussions followed the guiding principle, *“A future for rural people and places in which rural health services are affordable and accessible for rural residents through a sustainable health system that delivers high quality, high value services. A high-performing rural health system informed by the needs of each unique rural community and population groups will improve community health and well-being.”*

We request that CMS use the RHTP as a vehicle to affect the vision proposed by the Future of Rural Health Summit by embedding its principles into initiative design and implementation. **Integration and alignment towards population health and alternative payment methodology must be at the core of any RHTP investments in order to truly transform health care in rural America.** Doing so will ensure a long-lasting and sustainable rural health system that puts health and well-being at the forefront.

The Summit convening coalesced around a common vision statement for the future of rural health that committed to:

“a national framework, based on key directives, adaptable to the unique characteristics of rural communities, which includes aligned financial incentives and a minimum floor of essential services, plus vital community services relevant to the community’s or regional needs (e.g., regional centers of excellence), that move beyond the walls of the hospital to include social, public health, and economic factors.”

This summit vision statement is supported by key directives that include a:

- Focus on supporting economically viable and thriving rural communities
- Symbiotic relationship between community development policy and health policy
- Rural health system designed to promote health and well-being
- Preservation of what exists that ensures access to affordable, high-quality services

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rupri.org/wp-content/uploads/Report-Future-of-Rural-Health-Summit.pdf>



In order to create thriving rural communities that in turn have accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare systems, there needs to be a broader focus on community, especially outside of the healthcare system providing clinical care. Summit participants focused on a framework that addresses the full continuum of care, referring to all services helping individuals realize their optimum health status, from pre-birth through palliative (end-of-life) care. The future rural health infrastructure must be inclusive of the use of data and technology to expand interoperability and build capacity from existing infrastructure. Inclusion, tracking, and measurement of health-related social needs (HRSN) as indicators to drive policies and programs were emphasized to ensure the future of rural health is inclusive of services that address health broadly. Summit participants were particularly sensitive to the need to keep many services based in local rural communities but recognized that it was more feasible to include such services within rural regions rather than specific rural communities. The final two themes that emerged addressed potential actions, reminding stakeholders to build upon the assets already present in rural communities while still addressing the gaps identified through evidence-based needs assessments.

These directives are not only aspirational but actionable. The RHTP offers a rare platform to operationalize the summit findings in ways that are both locally responsive and nationally scalable. The framework identified for the Future of Rural Health also largely aligns with the strategic goals outlined in the RHTP Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – making rural America healthy again, sustainable access, workforce development, innovative care, and tech innovation.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to rural health innovation. We stand ready to support CMS in advancing this transformative agenda. We request a meeting with your office to discuss how our vision can be made into reality through the RHTP. To coordinate, please contact NRHA's Government Affairs and Policy Director Alexa McKinley Abel ([amckinley@ruralhealth.us](mailto:amckinley@ruralhealth.us)).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Morgan", is written over a light gray dotted grid background.

Alan Morgan  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Rural Health Association

Cc: Dr. Mehmet Oz, Administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
Katherine Sapra, Deputy Director, CMS Office of Rural Health Transformation