



NRHA Policy Institute 2026



Welcome to NRHA's 37th Annual Rural Health Policy Institute: *Advocacy Toolkit*



Join the National Rural Health Association on Feb. 10-12 in Washington D.C., where you'll hear about rural health priorities from elected officials, understand how to successfully engage in NRHA's advocacy, develop rapport with your Congressional delegation, learn new ways NRHA is advancing the association's priorities, and much more!





Policy Institute Background



The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is a national nonprofit membership organization that brings together thousands of rural advocates across the United States.

NRHA membership consists of a diverse collection of individuals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health. The association's mission is to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research.

Rural Health Policy Institute

Feb 10-12, 2026 Washington D.C.

Let's revitalize rural health together!

Take the next step with NRHA and hundreds of rural health advocates from across the nation **Feb. 10-12** in **Washington, D.C.** to bring your message to the Capitol at **NRHA's 37th Rural Health Policy Institute**.

The spotlight on rural health is growing. Now, more than ever, it is crucial to advocate for the future of health policy and create sustainable change to shape our rural communities.

You'll have the chance to:

- Hear rural health priorities from elected officials
- Understand how to successfully engage in NRHA advocacy
- Develop rapport with your Congressional delegation
- Learn how to put rural policy into practice
- Advance NRHA's rural health policy agenda

Dig in to our **at-a-glance agenda** for a better view of this three-day event:

- **DAY ONE:** Tuesday, February 10th- *Planting Policy: Where Rural Health Takes Root*
- **DAY TWO:** Wednesday, February 11th- *Branching out: Spread our message to Capitol Hill*
- **DAY THREE:** Thursday, February 12th- *Cultivating Results: Put Policy into Practice*

For more information check out our PI webpage [here](#).



National Rural Health Association



Post on Social Media

Use our Policy Institute hashtags!

- #RevitalizeRural
- #NRHA26DC
- #PI26NRHA
- #XXDelegation, XX = your state abbreviation!
- #RuralHealth

Don't forget to tag us in your posts!

Follow NRHA (@ruralhealth) and @NRHA_Advocacy on social media!

@NRHA_Advocacy



@ruralhealth



Social media template posts

- We are excited to be in Washington, DC at NRHA's 37th Annual Rural Health Policy Institute to help advocate for priorities to improve rural health care access! #revitalizerural #NRHA26DC
- Effective advocacy is key to real and lasting #ruralhealth policy change. That's why we're heading to Capitol Hill to tell elected officials what our rural community needs at NRHA's Rural Health Policy Institute! #NRHA26DC
- The #XXDelegation is heading to Capitol Hill to #revitalizerural! We are at NRHA's Rural Health Policy Institute to advocate for lasting rural healthcare change! #NRHA26DC #PI26NRHA
- We're planting the seeds of change - Rural America deserves a chance to be more than resilient, we deserve a chance to thrive! We're at NRHA's Rural Health Policy Institute to #revitalizerural and advocate for change! #NRHA26DC #PI26NRHA



National Rural Health Association



How to Use Social Media

Tips on how to use social media to enhance your advocacy

1. Have a specific and clear message when posting

Make sure the message you are trying to convey is easy to quickly read, digest, and understand. You only have a brief moment to make an impact with a post, so make sure your point is succinct and powerful!

2. Use hashtags

Using popular hashtags, or making your own unique hashtag for people to utilize, is a great way to engage followers and also make sure your post reaches relevant audiences.

3. Create engaging visuals

Make sure that your visuals are easy to read and are formatted in a way that is both engaging and conveys your message. Photos of your experience share volumes.

4. Link or tag relevant external pages and accounts

Utilize external resources to reroute your audience's attention to other information that you want them to see, use, or follow.

5. Tell a story

Make it personal so your audience can understand and relate to your perspective.

6. Be consistent with posting

Stay consistent with posting periodically and stick to a theme visually throughout.

7. Engage or collaborate with others

Tag other organizations and collaborate on social media with others to extend your reach. Members of Congress love to be tagged!

8. Advertise and outreach

Make sure you are advertising your social media at every opportunity!

NRHA Advocacy Social Media



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Engaging with Congress



Contact Members and Staff about supporting priority bills

The 119th Congress began in January 2025 and there is plenty of work to be done, especially around rural health funding and prioritizing rural health programs. Follow the steps below on tips for how to connect with your Members of Congress. Make sure to share information about the importance of rural health and the urgency to act to sustain rural health programs.

1

- Find your Legislator and other elected officials by entering your zip code [here](#).
- Most members of Congress have a website with contact information. If you have trouble finding that information, please [contact NRHA Government Affairs staff](#).

2

- Email the member of Congress to request a meeting. Find out who the health staffer is or use the general office inquiry form to send the meeting request.
- Include any relevant agenda items or materials so they have a chance to review them before your meeting.

3

- During the meeting, thank the Member or staffer for any positive actions that they've taken supporting rural health, introduce your concern, share your personal story related to the issue, and make a clear request, if possible.
- Use the talking points and resources provided in this toolkit below as a guide to establish next steps the Member or staff can make.

4

- Follow Up. After the meeting, thank the staffer or Member of Congress for their time. Be sure to get their email address and follow up with a thank you and any additional materials needed.



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Rural Health Advocacy Asks Talking Points



Immediate Actions Is Needed to Secure Rural Health Access

- Rural America is home to **more than 62 million people** whose health and economic stability depend on a federal partnership that keeps pace with rapidly shifting needs. Yet rural hospitals, clinics, and workforce pipelines continue to face unprecedented strain, threatening access to care for entire regions.
- **Since 2010, almost 200 hospitals have closed or discontinued inpatient services and in 2024 nearly 50% of rural hospitals have negative operating margins.** When a rural hospital closes, not only does the community lose access to vital health care, but a major employer and community lynchpin exits, affecting the larger community.

What Congress Can Do to Support Rural Patients and Providers

- In 2026, Congress must prioritize (re)authorizing vital rural health programs in order to support rural communities' access to local care, sustain the rural health infrastructure, and bolster the workforce.
- Rural health spending is a relatively small percentage of the federal annual budget but is vitally important for maintaining access to care for individuals living in rural America.
- **(PERSONAL STORY OF WHY FEDERAL RURAL HEALTH PROGRAMS MATTER)**



RURAL HOSPITALS: Investing in a strong rural safety net

Rural hospitals suffer from long-standing challenges, including workforce shortages, low patient volumes, a lower socio-economic population, and challenging payer mixes. Ensure rural hospitals have resources to sustain operations through the following:

Department of Agriculture Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program: This program provides free, flexible, on-the-ground technical assistance to rural hospitals at-risk of closure to prevent closures and maintain essential healthcare services in rural communities.

- Technical assistance equips hospitals with the skills to help better manage their financial and business strategies and address issues causing strain on their systems.
- Nearly **130 rural hospitals** have received or are receiving technical assistance since the pilot began in 2018.
- An **estimated \$1.7 million in financial opportunity** is identified per project with an **average project cost of \$52,000**.



House: Co-sponsor H.R. 1417, the Rural Health Care Facility Technical Assistance Program Act (Reps. Ronny Jackson, Tokuda)

Senate: Co-sponsor S. 1282, the Rural Development Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act (Sens. Rounds, Welch)



The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Grant Program: The Flex programs provides needed resources for CAHs, small rural hospitals, rural health clinics, and emergency medical services.

- Supports include education and training investments, infrastructure support to strengthen financial and operational performance for small rural hospitals, data infrastructure support to enhance data and reporting capabilities, and other activities that improve access to high quality care in rural areas.
- Flex plays a critical role in helping **(your state's) (insert number of CAHs) Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs)** improve their financial status and focus on enhancing their quality of care.
- Flex must be reauthorized to provide stability for the program. Without Flex, rural hospitals will be more at risk of closure. This would include the **XX rural hospitals in (your state)** that are operating with negative profit margins.

House: Co-sponsor H.R. 6804, the Rural Hospital Flexibility Act (Reps. Miller, Sewell)

Senate: Co-sponsor S. 3250, the Rural Hospital Flexibility Act (Sens. Hassan, Blackburn, Barrasso, Cortez Masto)



PROVIDERS: Building a Robust Rural Healthcare Workforce

Rural residents have faced chronic and sometimes severe shortages of primary care providers for decades. **Nearly 70% of all rural counties are Health Professional Shortage Areas.** However, rural training is a promising pathway to growing a robust workforce.

Rural Residency Planning and Development Program: This program provides start-up funding for hospitals to begin new rural residency programs and address the ongoing workforce shortages faced by rural communities.

- Despite **only 2% of Medicare Graduate Medical Education training occurring in rural areas**, **graduates of rural residency programs are 5.4 times as likely to choose rural practice.**
- **X programs in (your state) are funded by RRPD.**
- Since the pilot program began in 2019 RRPD grantees have:
 - Established 62 new accredited rural residency programs or rural track programs in family medicine, internal medicine, psychiatry, and general surgery.
 - Created 752 approved new residency positions in rural areas, with over 660 enrolled.
 - Made awards to 103 grantees across 36 states and 1 territory.



House: Co-sponsor H.R. 6468, the Rural Residency Planning and Development Act (Reps. Miller, Tokuda, Adrian Smith, Troy Carter)

Senate: Support the Rural Residency Planning and Development Act when it is introduced in the Senate



Rural Health Advocacy Asks Talking Points



COMMUNITY HEALTH: Building Rural Health Opportunity

Medical deserts are appearing across rural America leaving many without timely access to care. It is essential that Congress authorize safety net programs that aim to expand access to health care, improve health outcomes, and increase the quality and efficiency of health care delivery in rural America.

Rural Health Care Services Outreach Program: Outreach grants support rural, community-driven initiatives that promote improved access to care, enhance care coordination, foster sustainable solutions for chronic disease prevention and management in rural areas. Congress must continue to support healthcare delivery in rural areas by supporting reauthorization.

- Outreach grants encourage longevity by providing initial start-up funding and then requiring recipients to identify and implement strategies to continue the projects after federal funding ends.
- Outreach program grantees have a track record of improving population health and starting sustainable programs that allow more rural residents to receive direct healthcare services:
 - **Over a half million rural residents** received direct services through Outreach programs, in 2023.
 - Rural Health Network Development Program grantees **generated an average of \$2.00 of economic impact** into their rural communities for every Outreach program dollar spent.



House: Co-sponsor H.R. 2493, the Improving Care in Rural America Reauthorization Act (Reps. Buddy Carter, Figures, Rep. Schrier, Rep. Rulli) and urge House leadership to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote.

Senate: Co-sponsor S. 2301, the Improving Care in Rural America Reauthorization Act (Sens. Scott, Smith, Lummis, Kaine) and urge Senate leadership to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote.



The Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP): RCORP is the only opioid prevention and treatment program exclusively targeted to rural communities. RCORP is a multi-year initiative that addresses barriers to treatment for substance use disorder (SUD), including opioid use disorder (OUD).

- RCORP-supported rural counties had **1.2 more waivered clinicians per 100,000 population** to prescribe buprenorphine, which is a medication for opioid use disorder.
- RCORP counties also had **57.5 more treatment slots per 100,000 population** compared to non-RCORP counties.

House: Co-sponsor H.R. 6407, the RCORP Authorization Act (Reps. Miller, Tonko, Buddy Carter, Sewell)

Senate: Support the RCORP Authorization Act when it is introduced in the Senate



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Rural Health (ORH): ORH enhances implementation of CDC's rural public health portfolio, coordinates efforts across CDC programs, and leads a strategic plan for rural public health across the agency.

- Rural residents experience a higher likelihood of death from leading chronic diseases and unintentional injury.
- **CDC must have a permanent, central office to coordinate and streamline rural public health efforts across the agency.**

House: Co-sponsoring H.R. 3102, the Rural Health Focus Act (Reps. Guest, Gluesenkamp Perez)

Senate: Co-sponsoring S. 403, the Rural Health Focus Act (Sens. Hyde Smith, Merkley)



COVERAGE: Investing in a strong rural safety net

Rural facilities disproportionately depend on reimbursement from public payers, including Medicaid, Medicare, and the Marketplaces, therefore reductions to coverage for rural residents will force many facilities to reduce or eliminate essential services, delay much-needed facility upgrades, or close their doors entirely. Without continued policies that guarantee sustainable reimbursement, rural hospitals and clinics will remain at risk. Loss of coverage for rural residents will mean delaying or forgoing care and widening the gap between rural and urban health outcomes.

- Rural residents are more likely to rely on the individual Marketplaces because fewer rural employers offer coverage and rural workers are more often self-employed or work in small businesses.
- Under H.R. 1, federal Medicaid spending in rural areas is estimated to **decline by \$137 billion**, more than the \$50 billion appropriated for the Rural Health Transformation Program. One-time funding, while significant, cannot by itself secure the long-term stability of rural providers. **RHTP program is an important step forward, but it must be paired with durable reforms that ensure rural Americans have reliable access to care for years to come.**
- If ePTCs are not restored, rural residents with Marketplace coverage will feel the greatest impact: rural areas are projected to see **a 30% drop in Marketplace coverage** and a **37% rise in the number of people without insurance**.



Delay implementation of harmful Medicaid policies that will result in loss of coverage for rural residents and increased uncompensated care rates for rural hospitals.

Pass the H.R.5145, the Bipartisan Premium Tax Credit Extension Act to extend ePTCs through 2026 Reps. Kiggans (R-VA) & Suozzi (D-NY)



NRHA Advocacy Materials:

Core Materials 1 pagers

These core advocacy materials can be used to provide support for main priorities and initiatives about rural health legislative priorities.

[NRHA
Legislative
Agenda 2026](#)

[FY 2027
Appropriations](#)

[Rural
Health 101](#)

[Rural Health
Program
Authorizations](#)

Our 2026 Rural Health Advocacy Asks is a new streamlined resource of key requests when advocating for rural priorities in the 119th Congress.

[2026 Rural Health
Advocacy Asks](#)



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NRHA Advocacy Materials:

Issue-Specific 1 pagers

These issue-specific advocacy materials can be used to provide support for targeted initiatives about rural health legislative priorities.

