

April 24, 2020

Rural Health Information during COVID-19

Dear Rural Stakeholders,



To continue to have consistent and efficient communication to provide rural health stakeholders with the information needed during this global pandemic, here are updates from the rural health programs at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

As mentioned previously, for critical information relating to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we recommend that you regularly monitor information on the [Iowa Department of Public Health COVID-19 Page](#). In addition, discover the latest resources, maps and information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) on coronavirus.iowa.gov.

For additional resources and updates, see the following pages. Please reach out for technical assistance and for any questions you may have.

We are an ongoing resource for you.

Best,

Rural Health Programs

Iowa Department of Public Health

For questions, contact:

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Updates:

On April 22, 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) updated their provider relief website with additional information about how they plan to spend the rest of the \$100 billion allocated for healthcare providers by the CARES Act. In this update, HHS made it clear that rural health clinics and rural hospitals will receive \$10 billion. See [CARES Act Provider Relief Fund](#).

President Trump Signs New Relief for Small Businesses. See [link](#) for details on what is in the \$484 Billion Coronavirus Bill. This bill includes \$75 Billion for hospitals.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides daily updates and guidance. See [CDC COVID-19 Updates](#). New this week is a breakdown of [factors that influence racial and ethnic minority group health](#). Another page updated daily has [demographic characteristics of known cases in the U.S.](#)

[The CDC also does regular clinical calls for public health emergencies](#), called Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA).

CMS Releases Additional Blanket Waivers for Long-Term Care Hospitals, Rural Health Clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers and Intermediate Care Facilities. CMS continues to release additional blanket waivers to the healthcare community in order to provide the flexibilities needed to take care of patients during this public health emergency. CMS is providing additional blanket waivers related to care for patients in Long-Term Care Hospitals (LTCHs), temporary expansion locations of Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), staffing and training modifications in Intermediate Care Facilities for individuals with Intellectual disabilities, and the limit for substitute billing arrangements (locum tenens). See [Guidance](#).

HHS Awards Nearly \$165 Million to Combat COVID-19 in Rural Communities. On April 22, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) awarded nearly \$165 million to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in rural communities. These investments will support 1,779 small rural hospitals and provide additional funding to 14 HRSA-funded Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) to provide technical assistance on telehealth to help rural and underserved areas combat COVID-19. See [HHS Awards Nearly \\$165 Million to Combat COVID-19 in Rural Communities](#).

HHS Launches New Telehealth Website. For patients, the [website](#) provides resources so that they can learn more about accessing health care through telehealth; for providers, the site is a resource to help them incorporate telehealth into their practices.

ACL Announces \$1 Billion in CARES Act Grants to Support Older Adults and People with Disabilities. Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) will administer grants to boost programs that deliver meals, ensure safe transitions home following hospitalizations, and provide other

essential services to older Americans and Americans with disabilities during this challenging time. To read more, see [ACL Announces \\$1 Billion in CARES Act Grants to Support Older Adults and People with Disabilities](#).

SAMHSA to Release \$110 Million in Emergency Grant Funding, read more [here](#). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has expedited its process to release emergency grants to strengthen access to treatments for substance use disorders and serious mental illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. SAMHSA has also updated its list of [Frequently Asked Questions about provision of methadone and buprenorphine](#) for treatment of opioid use disorder during the emergency.

Bipartisan Policy Center: Confronting Rural America's Health Care Crisis. The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is a think tank combining ideas and solutions from both parties. In this [report](#), the BPC's Rural Health Task Force makes policy recommendations to stabilize rural health care in the current emergency and the long term.

CMS Issues COVID-19 Guidance for RHCs and FQHCs. On April 17, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) published [guidance](#) for Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Congress and CMS made several changes to the RHC and FQHC requirements and payments. These changes include new payment for telehealth services, expansion of virtual communication services, and revision of the home health agency shortage requirement for visiting nursing services, among others.

Guidance for Small Governmental Hospitals on Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Qualification. The National Rural Health Association received guidance from the United States Treasury and Small Business Administration (SBA) on the PPP. This guidance clarifies that a hospital that is otherwise eligible to receive a PPP loan as a business concern or nonprofit organization (described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of such Code) shall not be rendered ineligible for a PPP loan due to ownership by a state or local government if the hospital receives less than 50% of its funding from state or local government sources, exclusive of Medicaid. The Administrator, in consultation with the Secretary, determined that this exception to the general ineligibility of government-owned entities, 13 CFR 120.110(j), is appropriate to effectuate the purposes of the CARES Act. Please see the official interim final rule language [here](#).

Webinar Opportunities:

[Application Assistance for Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response](#) – Friday, April 24 at 3:00 pm CST. In this 90-minute webinar, the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy will assist applicants of the [HRSA Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Program](#) – May 6. (See *What's New Section* above for details of this new funding opportunity.) Call-In Number 800-857-4875; Participant Code: 3831230.

[Telehealth 101: Intro and Q&A](#) – Fridays at 3:00 pm CST. The HRSA/FORHP-supported South Central Telehealth Resource Center (TRC) will provide telehealth and telemedicine basics each Friday through May 8. [Get more resources and find your regional TRC online.](#)

[NOSORH Rural Health Data Institute](#) – **Register by May 1.** The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) will hold **a series of 90-minute webinars each week from May 12 to June 30.** Designed for those with limited knowledge of how to use data, the learning sessions will move through the process of collecting data, cleaning it up, and analyzing it in a way that everyone can understand. The Institute is open to rural health professionals, including clinical, administrative, and academic personnel.