

Talking Points: [Urge Congress to Invest in Rural Health \(FY 2026 Appropriations\).](#)

Background:

- Since 2010, nearly 193 rural hospitals have closed or discontinued inpatient services. 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.
- In this economic environment, it is critical Congress uses every tool to equip rural providers with the stability they need to keep their doors open. Currently, nearly 50 percent of rural hospitals have negative operating margins.
- Rural providers suffer from long-standing challenges, including workforce shortages, low patient volumes, higher prevalence of chronic diseases, a lower socio-economic population, and challenging payer mixes.
- 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.

Requests:

- The President's FY 2026 Budget request calls on Congress to eliminate two longstanding rural health programs: the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility program and State Offices of Rural Health, both of which are essential to ensuring access to care for rural Americans. This will upend rural health care delivery by ending proven programs, leading to a critical underfunding of rural health systems and ultimately threatening rural provider stability and patient access.
- **[PERSONAL STORY OF THE IMPACT OF RURAL HEALTH AND IMPORTANCE OF FUNDING]**
- Rural programs proposed for elimination in the President's budget:
 - **The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Grant Program**
 - Elimination of the Flex program would take away needed resources for small hospital-based services for Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs), emergency medical service (EMS), rural health clinics, and health professionals.
 - The Flex program has a proven track record of improving the financial stability of small rural hospitals and participation in value-based efforts.
 - The program also offers education and training and provides infrastructure support that allows small rural hospitals to strengthen financial and operational performance, and invest in activities that improve access to high quality care in rural areas.
 - **State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Program**
 - SORH are a one-stop shop for information for community leaders and healthcare providers in the nation's rural communities, growing collaborative approaches to rural health access and leadership and providing support to build capacity and resources to improve rural health.
 - Elimination of the SORH program would take away funding dedicated to helping small rural communities leverage state and federal resources to develop long-term solutions

to rural health programs. Loss of the SORH program would lead to rural communities no longer having the foundational funding to support core staffing and operations that enables states expand workforce development, primary care access, and education.

- Other core rural programs to highlight:
 - **Rural Health Outreach Services grants** support rural, community-driven initiatives that promote improved access to care, enhance care coordination, and foster sustainable solutions for chronic disease prevention and management in rural areas. In FY 2022, over 475,000 individuals received direct services in over 400 rural counties through these programs, with over 85% of grant recipients demonstrating improvement in one or more clinical measures.
 - **The Rural Residency Planning and Development Program (RRPD)**. RRPD supports the development of new rural residency programs to address the ongoing workforce shortages faced by rural communities. Since 2019, this program has created 54 new accredited rural residency programs or rural track programs in family medicine, internal medicine, psychiatry, and general surgery and received approval for approximately 683 new residency positions in rural areas.
 - **The Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)** is a multi-year initiative that addresses barriers to treatment for substance use disorder (SUD), including opioid use disorder (OUD). RCORP funds rural communities in planning and implementation efforts related to medication assisted treatment, neonatal abstinence syndrome, psychostimulant support, overdose response, and child, adolescent, and adult behavioral health support.
 - **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Rural Health (ORH)**. The office 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.
- NRHA Resources:
 - [NRHA FY26 Appropriations Asks Table](#)
 - [NRHA Rural Program Reauthorizations](#)
- NOSORH Resources:
 - [SORH Talking Points](#)
 - [SORH Rural Matters Fact Sheet](#)
 - [2025 SORH Appropriations Fact Sheet](#)
- RRPD Resources:
 - [RRPD one-pager](#)
- Flex Resources:
 - [Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Flex Program Talking Points](#)