



ARKANSAS RURAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

NOV. 2023

Health Workforce: Equip & Educate

ARHP initiatives to mobilize a robust, local health workforce

THE FACTS

RURAL ECOSYSTEM

The rural hospital is often the **largest and most stable employer** in a small town. The loss of a rural hospital can devastate a local economy.

OUTWARD MIGRATION

The 23-county region has experienced a **population loss of 2.8%** between April 2020-July 2022.¹

HEALTH WORKFORCE SHORTAGE AREA

The region is designated by HRSA as a **health professional shortage and medically underserved area**.²

ACCESS BARRIERS

Students require additional support and flexibility due to low educational attainment, long travel distances, childcare cost burden, and income. [Service area averages: 84.9% high school graduate, 15.8% bachelor's degree or higher³; mean travel time to work: 23 min³; childcare cost burden: 27%⁴; Median household income: \$44,661³]



What if the next generation of healthcare professionals simply needed increased access to support and opportunities?

In early 2020, the need for a locally grown health workforce became more apparent than ever before. Rural residents with a knowledge of and commitment to the local community were the most promising answer to meet growing health workforce shortages. At the same time, students in the resource-deficient region needed practical assistance and support to enter and complete health workforce education programs. For the past three years, ARHP has devoted significant efforts to supporting traditional and non-traditional students to enter and successfully complete certificate, undergraduate, and graduate education programs in healthcare to meet local needs.

Summer Internships for College Students.

Rising and current college students can intern at ARHP and member healthcare organizations throughout the service area to gain first-hand experience, valuable certifications, and training. Many student interns choose to further their training and education within the health sector. During Summer 2022 and 2023, the organization facilitated 37 student internships.

Connect to Emergency Response. The newest health workforce program for the organization provides individuals with scholarships and other needed support to successfully engage in and complete Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Training in 1) Emergency Medical Training (EMT)

SOURCES: 1: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program. • 2022. 2: HRSA, Find Shortage Areas. data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area. Accessed May 31, 2023. • 3: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 5-Year Estimates. 2017-2021. • 4: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2023.

DECREASING EDUCATION OBSTACLES IN RURAL ARKANSAS

and 2) Paramedics programs. Training is offered in partnership with five community colleges and universities at six campuses throughout the 19-county Arkansas Delta service area (East Arkansas Community College, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, Southeast Arkansas College, University of Arkansas at Monticello, and South Arkansas College). The first training cohorts launch January 2024 (EMT, 20 students) and Summer 2024 (Paramedic, 10 students). The program anticipates training over 70 Delta students over a three-year period.

Connect to Tech. The program offers full scholarships and student support services for individuals to successfully complete a certificate or degree program in Health Information Technology or Behavioral Health Technology (in partnership with University of Arkansas at Monticello and Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas). Students are continually engaged by the ARHP Student Success Coordinator to encourage success and completion of the certificate or degree program. Individuals with demonstrated financial need receive tuition, fees, and a laptop. Participants commit to working in an Arkansas Delta health system upon completion. To date, 74 students have been provided financial assistance, totaling approximately \$284,320.

Connect to Healthcare Operations. The program offers full scholarships and student support services for individuals (predominantly in existing health careers) to successfully complete a certificate or degree program in healthcare business operations (in partnership with University of Arkansas Grantham). Programs of study include medical coding and billing, health information management, clinical documentation, and healthcare administration. The program features rolling monthly admissions to make training accessible for non-traditional students and is offered in



an exclusively online format to decrease access barriers related to work schedules, transportation, and childcare. Individuals with demonstrated financial need receive tuition, fees, and a laptop. Participants are strongly encouraged to work within the region upon completion. To date, 39 individuals have enrolled in the program with \$271,106 awarded in scholarships.

Nursing Student Clinicals. Due to a shortage of locally available nursing student clinical rotations and nurse preceptors, ARHP launched the first regional nursing collaborative in 2021. Nurse leaders from 9 nursing schools, 17 hospitals, and 2 federally qualified health centers meet together regularly to strengthen local nursing programs. Efforts have focused on laying critical groundwork for new and expanded academic practice partnerships, centralized clinical placement software, and the rural Arkansas nursing development network.

Medical School Preceptorships. In order to increase exposure to rural clinical experience and recruit physicians to the region, ARHP partners with three medical schools in the state (University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, NYIT at Arkansas State, Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine) to coordinate and schedule clinical rotations. Third- and fourth-year medical students are placed with board-certified physicians employed at ARHP member hospitals. The partnership directly increases the number of available medical student preceptorship slots, while also allowing for distinctly rural training experiences.

Rural Physician Residency Program. Through the HRSA Rural Residency Training Track Program grant, ARHP is working with medical schools, hospital, and federally qualified health center partners to lay the groundwork for a ACGME accredited program in Family Medicine in Ashley and Chicot Counties, Arkansas. Partners include the Arkansas College of Health Education, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Jefferson Regional, Ashley County Medical Center, and Mainline Health Systems.

