

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 programs for the organization provide individuals with scholarships and other needed support to successfully engage in and complete Emergency Medical Services (EMS) training. The first initiative supports 1) Emergency Medical Training (EMT) and 2) Paramedics programs. Training is offered in partnership with five community colleges and universities

DECREASING EDUCATION OBSTACLES IN RURAL ARKANSAS

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). 2024 training cohorts include EMT (20 students) and Paramedic (10 students). The program anticipates training over 70 Delta students over a three-year period.

The second initiative supports 1) Emergency Medical Training (EMT), 2) Paramedic, and 3) Community Paramedic programs. Efforts will provide one-on-one and financial support (i.e. tuition, books, fees, supplies) to 26 rural residents desiring to pursue and/or advance in an EMS career with demonstrated financial barriers to training over the two-year period. Key partners include Pafford Medical Services and ProMed Ambulance.

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, 81 students have been provided financial assistance, totaling approximately \$478,932.

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, 43 individuals have enrolled in the program with \$335,445 awarded in scholarships.

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 Health Workforce Development Platform: The new initiative will develop a comprehensive and interactive rural health workforce toolkit to engage and assist rural key stakeholders and community members to effectively develop strategic plans shaping rural health workforce efforts. Regional and state-wide strategic plans will also be developed during the one-year initiative.

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.

