



ARKANSAS RURAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

APRIL 2024

# Connect to Healthcare Operations

An ARHP health workforce training initiative

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

### HEALTH WORKFORCE SHORTAGE AREA

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

### 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 higher<sup>3</sup>; mean travel time to work: 23 min<sup>3</sup>; childcare cost burden: 27%<sup>4</sup>; Median household income: \$44,661<sup>3</sup>]



## What if you could fill critical healthcare administration vacancies with your best staff?

In early 2022, ARHP member healthcare administrators discussed the pressing need for qualified staff to fill vacancies in medical billing and coding, insurance claims processing, and business operations. By fall 2022, ARHP secured HRSA funds to launch a four-year training program to increase the number of local, skilled administrative support professionals while directly supporting and strengthening the financial viability of rural health systems.

**The Opportunity.** ARHP has partnered with the University of Arkansas Grantham to offer individuals (predominantly existing healthcare staff) with access to online certificate, asso-

ciates, and bachelor's degree programs in 1) health information management, 2) medical coding & billing, 3) clinical documentation improvement, and 4) business operations for healthcare organizations. 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 commit to working in an Arkansas Delta health system upon successful program completion. To date, 43 individuals have enrolled in the program with \$156,449 awarded in scholarships.

SOURCES: 1: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program. • 2022. 2: HRSA, Find Shortage Areas. [data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area](https://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.