

CMS Touts Digital Health RHTP Investments In Eight States

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CMS is touting how its Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) awards are helping to support the expansion of digital health, robotics and telehealth programs in rural areas in eight states.

The Aug. 27 issue of MLN Connects Newsletter provides details about the recent RHTP-funded investments of Alabama, Alaska, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and West Virginia. On Aug. 28, CMS also announced details on Virginia's RHTP investments.

Alabama

Alabama received \$144 million to support 138 individual investments. Its priorities include modernizing technology and cybersecurity, specifically electronic health records and IT, and building "shared technology and referral networks to better coordinate care." Funding will also be directed towards expanding "primary, specialty, maternal and preventive care" through telehealth and mobile health services.

The state will also establish "school-based and telehealth services, mobile crisis response and stronger community behavioral health systems" to increase access to mental health and substance use disorder care in underserved rural areas, as well as rural training programs and scholarships to strengthen the rural health care workforce

Alaska

Alaska received \$160 million to support 142 individual projects focusing on novel technology, clinician training resources and tribal-led health care initiatives. The state is investing in the "first robotic assisted minimally invasive surgeries" in Southern Southeast Alaska, alongside an "AI imaging network across 21 acute care hospitals." The state also plans to begin developing a "drone-based pharmaceutical delivery system connecting villages" across 94,000 square miles, in an attempt to avoid the lengthy medication delivery delays that are common during winter.

The state is developing a “first-of-its-kind tribally led residential treatment and recovery campus in Southeast Alaska,” to expand access to “culturally responsive care” by integrating various facets of the state’s health care system, including “community-based healing services.”

Alaska is also strengthening the rural health care workforce by “enhancing the Alaska Family Medicine Residency Program,” which invests in recruitment and training to address the state’s shortage of primary care physicians.

North Dakota

North Dakota plans to use its near-\$199 million award upgrade clinical equipment to “expand specialty and emergency care services” and deliver faster diagnoses. The state will also invest in training and retaining clinicians, as well as deploying a “mobile mammography unit across western North Dakota” to remove transportation barriers for crucial services.

Ohio

Ohio was awarded around \$75 million, and plans to use it to support clinicians’ “needs assessments, outreach, and onboarding assistance” by improving access to the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) for rural health care providers, as well as improving pharmacists’ access to patient medical records.

The state will also connect “employers, schools, and community organizations to recruit, train, and retain health professionals in rural communities” through a \$10 million grant directed to Ohio University. It will also invest in developing and expanding Rural Health Innovation Hubs across 73 non-urban counties.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania was awarded \$193 million. Its investments will focus on improving patients’ access to care, specifically critical services including “emergency and non-emergency medical transportation,” “behavioral and maternal healthcare,” and technology for essential services. The state will also fund “renovations, structural improvements, equipment purchases, and essential supplies” for qualified health facilities.

South Dakota

South Dakota, with its \$90 million award, plans to expand health care services for its “tribal and priority population” through the establishment of “mobile tribal health services, maternal health resources,” and care coordination for underserved communities in frontier areas. It will also modernize clinical physical and digital infrastructure, including electronic health records, cybersecurity and network infrastructure, and virtual care capabilities.

The state will also expand general access to care, including “diagnostic and surgical capacity, emergency care,” and access to specialty services like oncology and cardiac care.

Virginia

Virginia was awarded \$189 million, and its investments will prioritize expanding the capacity of, and access to, rural health care by increasing training slots for rural clinicians and funding remote patient monitoring, maternal care, and community paramedicine programs. They will also fund expanded medical apprenticeships, credentialing opportunities, and earn-to-learn programs to strengthen the health care workforce pipeline.

The state will also establish a broad health care fund to support “early-stage health tech companies scale digital solutions, efforts to improve provider interoperability and productivity, integrated care for those dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, youth wellness initiatives, and ongoing program evaluation.”

West Virginia

West Virginia plans to direct \$10.5 million towards "Health to Prosperity" Workforce Grants, addressing populations with chronic physical conditions or substance-use disorders. The state will also expand access to remote patient monitoring and virtual health care technology across the state. -- *James Noyes* (jnoyes@iwpnews.com)