



# Rural Health Grant Opportunities

ISSUE BRIEF | Senate Bills 22-200 and 22-172

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated existing barriers to accessing care, especially in rural communities. Colorado's rural and frontier communities have difficulty recruiting and retaining health care workers – especially after the burnout that came with battling the challenges of COVID-19 and resulted in many leaving the profession – and thus, often have lesser levels of access to health care services and higher health care costs. This legislative session, the General Assembly passed two pieces of legislation with grant funding opportunities to expand access to care in rural Colorado by enhancing the rural health care workforce as well as providing funding to modernize outdated infrastructure.

## SB 22-200: Rural Provider Stimulus Grant Program

The bill creates the Rural Provider Access and Affordability Stimulus Grant Program to provide grants to qualified rural health care providers to improve health care services in rural communities through modernization of information technology infrastructure and to fund projects that expand access to health care. The bill provides \$4.8 million for health care affordability projects and \$4.8 million for health care access projects.

## What You Need to Know

### Eligibility

Qualified rural providers are defined as rural hospitals that have a lower net patient revenue or fund balance compared to other rural hospitals. Additional eligibility details will be determined by December 2022 by the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) in partnership with an Advisory Committee that will be appointed in July 2022. Grant funds must be distributed to qualified rural providers based on financial need or the ability to expand health care access and must be distributed by July 2024.

Grant applicants will be required to submit a written justification that includes the harm or need to be addressed, why the capital expenditure is appropriate, and a comparison of the proposed capital expenditure to at least two alternative capital expenditures as well as a demonstration as to why the proposed capital expenditure is superior.

### Permissible Uses for Grant Funds

1. **Modernize the information technology infrastructure** through projects such as those that create a shared analytics platform and care coordination platforms among rural providers or enable technologies that allow rural providers to communicate, share clinical information, and consult electronically to manage patient care, such as telehealth and e-consult systems.
2. **Expand access to health care in rural communities** with projects like those that extend hours for access to health care in rural communities; invest in dual-track emergency departments in rural communities; expand access to telemedicine in rural communities like remote monitoring support; provide new or replacement hospital beds in rural communities; expand access to remote patient monitoring systems in rural communities; expand access in rural communities to long-term care and recovery care in skilled nursing facilities; or create or expand sites that provide access in rural communities to surgical care, chemotherapy centers, imaging and advanced imaging, and behavioral health care.

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## Rural Health Grant Opportunities – *continued*

### SB 22-172: Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative

The bill establishes the Colorado Rural Health Care Workforce Initiative to expand the number of health care professionals practicing in rural or frontier counties. Beginning in fiscal year 2022-23, the bill appropriates \$1.2 million annually to the Department of Higher Education, a portion of which will be distributed to 11 medical programs to establish and operate a rural track program, with assistance from the University of Colorado’s School of Medicine’s Rural Program (Rural Program Office).

### What You Need to Know

#### Grant Recipients are Institutions of Higher Education

An institution of higher education (e.g., Colorado public universities, community colleges, local district colleges, and area technical colleges) may establish a health care professionals’ rural track or expand an existing rural track within any specified health care professional credential or degree program offered at the institution. Interested hospitals are encouraged to work with eligible institutions of higher education to leverage these funds in your communities.

Grant funding will support staff and faculty to develop and operate the rural track, provide housing subsidies for students’ clinical placements in rural or frontier communities, fund training for preceptors, and provide student scholarships. The grantee institution will conduct outreach to promote rural health care careers, prioritize admission for the rural track, provide scholarships, offer curriculum consistent with that developed by the Rural Program Office, assist students with clinical placements in rural and frontier counties, and provide administrative support.

The Rural Program Office will provide technical support to applying institutions, support students in rural tracks, and develop a relevant rural curriculum for grantee institutions to use. The Rural Program Office may also collaborate with Colorado area health education centers, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), CHA, and the Colorado Rural Health Center to assess unmet rural community health care priority needs, collect data to support the assessment, and make recommendations to the General Assembly for funding to support adding more schools, programs, and health care professionals to meet that need.

### Additional Resources

- [SB 22-200 Final bill text](#)
- [SB 22-200 Fiscal note](#)
  
- [SB 22-172 Final bill text](#)
- [SB 22-172 Fiscal note](#)