STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Arkansas House Newsletter

February 27, 2026

Improving Rural Health

Arkansas is moving forward with a major investment in rural healthcare through the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). In December, the state was awarded $208,779,396 for Fiscal Year 2026 as part of a nationwide, multi-year effort through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to strengthen healthcare access in rural communities. Over the next five years, the program will distribute $50 billion to states to reinforce and modernize rural health systems.

For Arkansas, this investment is especially significant. About 45% of our population—roughly 1.3 million people—live in rural areas, and 63 of 75 counties qualify as fully rural for federal program purposes. Many residents travel 25 to 35 miles to reach a hospital or specialty clinic. Nearly half of rural hospitals in the state are considered vulnerable to closure, and workforce shortages continue to strain providers. Rural communities also face higher rates of chronic disease, lower median incomes, and greater reliance on public insurance coverage.

The state’s application incorporated feedback from healthcare professionals, hospitals, higher education institutions, community nonprofits, and members of the Arkansas General Assembly. An online portal generated more than 300 ideas from Arkansans on how best to use the funds.

Arkansas’ plan focuses on four initiatives: HEART, promoting healthier lifestyles and preventive care; PACT, improving coordination of specialty, trauma, and telehealth services; RISE AR, strengthening the rural healthcare workforce; and THRIVE, expanding telehealth, technology-enabled monitoring, and modernized emergency response systems.

While the funding was announced in December, the work continues. Public meetings with stakeholders across the state began this week and will continue next week to gather additional input as implementation moves forward.

Below are the meetings scheduled:

Monday, March 2nd Mountain Home
Meeting: 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Sponsor: Arkansas RHTP
Location: Arkansas State University – Mountain Home
Trout Room at the Veda Sheid Community Development Center
1600 S College St., Mountain Home, AR 72653

Tuesday, March 3rd Hope
Meeting: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Sponsor: Arkansas RHTP
Location: University of Arkansas Community College Hope
Auditorium, Rapert Library
2500 S Main St, Hope, AR 71801

Tuesday, March 3rd Hot Springs
Meeting: 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Sponsor: Arkansas RHTP
Location: Arkansas School for Math, Sciences, + the Arts
200 Whittington Ave., Hot Springs, AR 71901

Tuesday, March 10th Monticello
Meeting: 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Sponsor: Arkansas RHTP

Location: University of Arkansas – Monticello

John F. Gibson University Center: Capitol Room

346 University Dr., Monticello, AR 71656