

# FACT SHEET

## State Office of Rural Health

### Overview

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) of the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) manages programs to develop regional quality health care systems to optimize health status and improve health outcomes in rural and underserved areas of Georgia. During State Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, the SORH program budget was \$6,686,311 in state funds and \$4,848,605 in federal funds, for a total budget of \$11,534,916 as of June 30, 2015.

The SORH administers programs to develop financially viable non-traditional regional systems designed to meet the health and service demands of the communities served. The desired outcomes are:

- Improvements in rural health.
- A strengthened health care safety net. The introduction of health care as a strategic industry in Georgia.

The SORH provides financial and technical support to select demonstration communities with the leadership and capacity to collaboratively design and implement models that:

- Increase access to integrated health services (physical health, prevention services, behavioral health, etc.).
- Transition to consumer-driven health care. Encourage regionalization of services so that providers are more financially stable.
- Use medical technology to improve health outcomes and efficiency.
- Ensure the long-term viability of the state's health care safety net.
- Ensure continued job opportunities for employees in new roles that support the innovative health care delivery model, as well as creating a strong workforce of healthy citizens.

### Primary Care Office

The Georgia Primary Care Office (PCO) promotes the expansion of access to comprehensive, quality primary health care for the underserved populations of Georgia through the development of new primary care access points and the recruitment and retention of safety net providers in underserved areas. The PCO works closely with the Georgia Association for Primary Health Care (GAPHC) to foster the development and expansion of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). Initiatives of the PCO include:

- **Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC)**  
The PCO is currently working cooperatively with GAPHC to administer \$1,250,000 in grant funding for FQHC development and expansion in the state.



### Health at a Glance

- 2 million residents in Georgia
- 195 Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA)\*
- 181 Dental Health Shortage Areas (DHPSA)\*
- 63 hospitals located in rural counties
- 33 FQHCs with 191 access points in GA

\*Note number of HPSA, DHPSA and MHPASAs fluctuates as HRSA approves them continuously. While there are fewer designated shortage areas, this means that Georgia is doing a better job placing health care professionals in areas of need.

### Programs

- State Primary Care Office
- Hospital Services Program
- Rural Health Stabilization Pilot Project
- Georgia Farmworkers' Health Program
- Health Care for the Homeless
- Statewide AHEC Network
- SORH Grants

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- **School-Based Telehealth Centers**  
Through a combination of state and federal funding, the PCO provides \$200,000 to the Georgia Partnership for TeleHealth (GPT) to establish school-based telehealth centers in rural county public school districts in Georgia.
- **National Health Service Corps (NHSC)**  
National Health Service Corps is a federal initiative to assist Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) in recruiting and retaining physicians and other allied health professionals through loan repayment and scholarship programs. Currently, there are 175 loan repayment program participants and 8 scholars serving 129 sites in Georgia.
- **Georgia Conrad State 30 J-1 Visa Waiver Program (GA30)**  
The J-1 Visa Waiver Program is a state and federal partnership that sponsors international medical graduates who agree to practice in underserved areas for a minimum of three years after completing their residency. At present, there are 80 participating physicians serving 29 counties.
- **National Rural Recruitment & Retention Network (3RNet)**  
The PCO manages the 3RNet recruitment website for the state, connecting rural health care facilities with physicians and other health professionals interested in working in rural communities. ([www.3RNet.org](http://www.3RNet.org))
- **Health Professional Shortage Designations**  
The PCO coordinates the Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) and Medically Underserved Area and Population (MUA/P) designation process within the state to ensure that Georgia's underserved communities may participate in federal and state programs targeting their special needs. Shortage designations include:
  - Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA)
  - Dental Health Professional Shortage Area (DHPSA)
  - Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA)
  - Medically Underserved Area/Population (MUA/P)

### Hospital Services Program

The Hospital Services Program provides technical assistance and resources principally to rural and Critical Access Hospitals. Federal funds of \$1,081,446 were received in support of the following grant initiatives:

- **Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant Program (Flex)**
  - Support for Quality Improvement in CAHs
  - Support for Operational and Financial Improvement in CAHs
  - Support for Health System Development and Community Engagement, including integrating EMS in regional and local systems of care
  - Designation of CAHs in the State (all eligible Georgia hospitals have been converted)

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- **Small Rural Health Improvement Program (SHIP)**

SHIP grant is designed to assist small, rural hospitals with costs related to one or potentially all three of these areas:

- Value-Based Purchasing (VBP)
- Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs)
- Payment Bundling (PB) or Prospective Payment System (PPS) Investment Activities

### Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee Pilot Program

The purpose of the Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee Pilot Program is to address the closure of rural hospitals and the shortage of rural physicians that results in loss of health care access to approximately 1,800,000 Georgians.

### Georgia Farmworker Health Program

The Georgia Farmworker Health Program works to improve the general health status of Georgia's migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families by providing cost-effective, culturally appropriate primary and preventive health services. Federal funding supporting this initiative totaled \$3,364,006 in FY 2015.

### Health Care for the Homeless

Health Care for the Homeless provides primary and preventive health care services to the homeless in Atlanta at St. Joseph's Mercy Care. State funds supporting this initiative totaled \$169,000.

### Statewide Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network

SORH collaborates with Georgia Regents University to administer this program. The mission of the Statewide AHEC Network is to create and sustain community-driven, regional programs promoting health care access for medically underserved Georgians by improving the quality, diversity, education, supply, distribution and retention of health care professionals. State funds supporting this program were \$2,661,088 in FY 2015.

### Georgia Charitable Care Network Grant

The State of Georgia provides funding to the Georgia Charitable Care Network to support Georgia's Free and Charitable Clinics throughout the state. These funds enhance service expansion through competitive sub-awards for the purchase of additional equipment and the addition of new service lines such as dental and behavioral health programs.

### Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education

Through funds collected from the Georgia Breast Cancer License Tag Program, SORH provides \$750,000 annually to the Georgia CORE to provide expanded breast cancer screening, education, outreach and access programs, and treatment services for the medically indigent.

### Georgia Southern University Research and Service Foundation Grant

Through a combination of state and federal funding, a \$200,000 Rural Community Health System Planning Grant was awarded to Georgia Southern to evaluate local healthcare access needs and assess financial sustainability of local health care delivery systems in four rural communities.

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### **Air Ambulance Grants**

Through state funding, the SORH office provides support to two air ambulance programs who serve the citizens of Georgia. Erlanger Life Force Air Ambulance receives \$600,000 annually, and responded to 517 calls within Georgia in 2014. Air Methods Corporation receives \$500,000 annually to support the Camilla base operation, and has had 302 requests for services to date in 2015.

### **EMS Specific Grants**

Through a combination of state and federal funding, SORH has \$605,000 of active EMS specific grants projects on-going in 2015. These projects include ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction education grants, STEMI system development support grants, EMS telehealth initiative projects, automated CPR device equipment grants, and research initiatives specific to the delivery of emergency services in rural Georgia.

### **Southeastern Firefighter's Burn Foundation Grant**

The State of Georgia allocates funding each year to provide a \$50,000 grant to the Southeastern Firefighter's Burn Foundation. This grant provides financial assistance for family members of patients admitted to the Joseph M. Still, Jr. Burn Center at Doctors Hospital, and can be used to cover expenses incurred during the patient's hospitalization.

### **For More Information**

Please contact the State Office of Rural Health for additional information by phone at 229-401-3090, online at [www.dch.georgia.gov/state-office-rural-health](http://www.dch.georgia.gov/state-office-rural-health), or by mail at 502 South Seventh Street, Cordele, GA 31015.