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October 1, 2025

SORH Short Rows is the quarterly newsletter from the Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) for all matters rural. It provides an update on the progress made to improve rural health in Georgia's hospitals, primary care practices, FQHCs, stakeholders, vendors, health care advocates, and legislators.

Leading the Fight Against Rural Health Disparities

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SORH Celebrates 25 Years in Cordele

In October 2025, the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) will celebrate 25 years at its current location in Cordele. All staff, past and present, have valued the opportunity to live and work among the rural residents our office was established to support.

The Georgia Office of Rural Health was originally established on June 4, 1998 and was positioned within the Department of Human Resources. On September 21, 1999, then Governor Roy Barnes signed an executive order transferring the Office of Rural Health and the State Primary Care Office to the Department of Community Health effective July 1, 1999. In October 2000, SORH was relocated from Atlanta to Cordele, including the Primary Care Office, which is one of the four program sections within SORH.

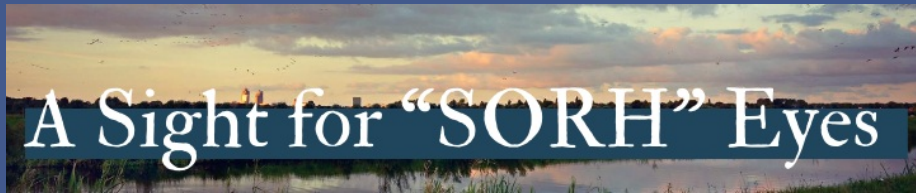


Please join us in celebrating our success as we continue to meet our mission to “improve access to health care in underserved areas and promote the development of community-based initiatives to

address essential healthcare needs in rural areas of Georgia.”

Nita Ham, Executive Director

State Office of Rural Health



SORH Hosts Rural Healthcare Transformation Program Town Hall



The SORH office in Cordele was host to one of three in-person town hall meetings where Executive Director, Division of Medical Assistance Plans (MAP), Stuart Portman and Director of Provider Services, MAP, James Peoples collected input for the Rural Healthcare Transformation Program (RHTP). A fourth town hall was held virtually. The town halls were an opportunity for interested parties to share thoughts and ideas on how Georgia should consider using the RHTP grant funds, if awarded.

The RHTP Notice of Funding Opportunity has been released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) with an application deadline of November 5, 2025.



Grant Funding Through SORH Aids Burn Foundation in Providing Resources to Burn Victims and Their Families



Steve Chalker was recently named CEO/President of The Burn Foundation of America.



The Chavis House, serves as a home away from home for families of burn victims receiving treatment at the Augusta facility.

Grant funding through the Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) supports the Burn Foundation of America in providing resources to burn patients and their families. The legislatively directed grant funding is used to offset a portion of the foundation's financial expenses.

Located in Augusta, the Burn Foundation of America aids burn patients and their families by providing a place to stay and non-medical necessities in times of need, including meals, transportation, and medication free of charge.

Earlier this year, Steve Chalker was appointed as the CEO/President of the foundation after previously serving as Chief Operations Officer. Steve expressed his appreciation for the partnership with SORH. He said, "The relationship that the Burn Foundation of America has with the Georgia State Office of Rural Health is the perfect collaboration between two great organizations. We could not be more thankful for our partnership, and we certainly count on the funding and support each year from the SORH."

To read the full story, click [here](#).

SORH Welcomes Leonta Willis



The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) is pleased to announce the addition of Leonta Willis. Leonta joined the team in August as the senior manager of the primary care office and farmworker health program.

Leonta brings years of healthcare experience to her role, including the ability to provide excellent leadership service and process management. Leonta has a proven track record of delivering high-quality project management skills, and providing facilitation methods to achieve strategic goals, initiatives and generate solutions.

While growing up in rural South Georgia and later starting a rural health career in Florida, she witnessed firsthand the persistent barriers to accessing care. "The experiences helped shape my purpose." Leonta is dedicated to SORH's mission of improving access to health care in rural and underserved areas and reducing health disparities.

"I am confident in my ability to provide excellent service to ensure the needs of the rural communities are met." "I am beyond excited to be back in the great state of Georgia, doing what I love, with the amazing State Office of Rural Health."

From Hospital Services

SORH Tours CareConnect Health's Family Medicine Clinic



CareConnect Health hosted the SORH Hospital Services and SORH Program teams on August 15, 2025 for a tour of its family medicine clinic and resident workspace area. SORH staff met at CareConnect's administrative office in Cordele where they learned about CareConnect's journey starting up one of the few family medicine residency programs operated by a Federally Qualified Health Care Center in the country.

Pictured above (L-R) are Cole Edwards, program operations specialist for the SORH Program; Ana Claire Gordon, program coordinator and assistant project manager at CareConnect; Bridget Mosley, CareConnect chief operational officer; Amanda Sutton, program operations specialist for SORH Hospital Services; Dawn Benson, program operations specialist for the SORH Program; Tristian Mitchell, CareConnect project manager; and Dawn Waldrip, senior manager for the SORH Program and Hospital Services.

Farmworker Program

Georgia Farmworker Health Program Receives Community Health Quality Recognition

The Georgia Farmworker Health Program (GFHP) was recently recognized for its work to improve health care for agricultural workers and their families.

GFHP received two Community Health Quality Recognition (CHQR) badges for high-value care and improving healthcare access for fiscal year 2025 from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

HRSA awards CHQR badges to health center programs and look-alikes (LALs) that have achieved quality improvements in access, clinical quality, health outcomes, and/or health information technology (HIT). The CHQR badges are awarded annually based on the latest Uniform Data System (UDS) reporting data.

To be awarded the High-Value Care badge, GFHP had to meet or exceed the quality score of 18.0 which represents the top 20 percentile for 2022 and 2023 and meet or fall below the percentage cost growth benchmark of 2.5 percent, or top 30 percent of 2022 and 2023.

To read the full story, click [here](#).

2025 Improving Health Care Access Badge



2025 High-Value Care Badge



SORH Attends Annual State Primary Care Conference in Rockville, Maryland



The SORH Primary Care Office's (PCO) Administrative Supervisor and HPSA Analyst, Dorothy Bryant, and Program Associate, Olakesta Outlaw-Houser attended the annual State Primary Care Conference in Rockville, MD on July 22-25, 2025.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) requires state representatives to attend the PCO conference to facilitate the identification of state-level primary care needs, promote the coordination of recruitment and retention efforts for healthcare providers, and serve as a crucial link for distributing technical assistance and resources to health centers across the state. This collaboration ensures that the efforts of the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and State PCOs align with state-specific needs and existing health infrastructure, as detailed in resources like the

The conference offered many interesting and informative sessions and concluded with a process improvement workshop that provided best practices in customer lifecycle management.

If you have questions about SORH Primary Care Office, please contact:

Dorothy Bryant: dbryant@dch.ga.gov Phone: 229-401-3095 or

Olakesta Outlaw: olakesta.outlaw@dch.ga.gov Phone: 229-401-3090.



...You Round Up Rattlesnakes!

Did you know that Whigham, Georgia hosts an annual Rattlesnake Roundup?

The Whigham Community Club has hosted the Rattlesnake Round-up for 65 years. The idea began in 1960 when locals hunted snakes to reduce the population and minimize the number of workers, dogs, and hunters in the field and forest bitten by the serpents.

What began as a group of friends gathering at a local gas station has grown into a community-wide event that draws nearly 20,000 visitors each year and more than 100 vendors providing arts and crafts, concessions, entertainment, and children's activities. Proceeds from the event benefit student and youth activities and provide monetary assistance to victims of home fires.

At the Round-up, trained professionals demonstrate the milking of snake venom from an Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake and snake handling with an emphasis on the importance of respecting the rattlesnakes and leaving them alone. The Rattlesnake Roundup is a “no kill” conservation event and many snakes are safely displayed for viewing.

To learn more about Whigham’s Rattlesnake Roundup, visit their website at <https://whighamrattlesnakeroundup.com/>.

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DCH Mission Statement

The Department of Community Health will provide Georgians with access to affordable, quality health care through effective planning, purchasing and oversight.

We are dedicated to
A Healthy Georgia.

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**Georgia Department of Community Health
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