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April 1, 2026

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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From the Executive Director's Desk

It's No April Fool's Joke!

Even though it's April Fool's Day, I promise I am not joking when I say just how busy our office has been. We're currently managing nearly 60 active grant projects while also bringing many new initiatives into the fold. On top of that, we're navigating a season of staff transitions, welcoming new faces, wishing others well as they move on, and shifting roles to better support our work.

All of this activity reflects the heart of what we do for rural Georgia. Like the communities we serve, we're constantly adapting, growing, and finding new ways to meet evolving needs. And through every change, one thing remains steady: our commitment to supporting rural communities and hospitals with excellence and purpose.

It's a little early to spill the details but stay tuned. We have some exciting surprises ahead, and that's no April Fool's joke.

Nita Ham, Executive Director
State Office of Rural Health

A Sight for “SORH” Eyes

Expanding Rural Trauma Training Through “The Traveling Training Show”



The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) and the Georgia Trauma Foundation continue to strengthen trauma education in rural communities through a partnership that brings high-quality continuing medical education directly to providers across the state. Nicknamed “The Traveling Training Show”, the initiative increases access, reduces travel barriers, and supports long-term sustainability of essential training for rural clinicians.

The purpose of the program is to coordinate and deliver quality continuing medical education courses in rural communities across Georgia with the goal of increased availability, access, and sustainability of the courses for rural providers and other medical personnel. The SORH recognized the need to bring these courses directly to the providers in rural communities and partnered with the Trauma Foundation to complete the mission of the project.

The Traveling Training Show provides at least 12 courses per year, but demand has far exceeded expectations: Program impact details include:

- Year 1: 20 courses • 250 students • 2,690 hours
- Year 2: 32 courses • 331 students • 3,728 hours
- Year 3: 33 courses expected • 318 students • 3,714 hours
- Year 4: 35 courses expected • 376 students • 4,132 hours

Total program impact: 120 courses, 1,275 students, and 14,264 classroom hours delivered statewide.

The initiative is funded through state dollars, providing \$275,185 annually for a total of \$1.1 million over four years. SORH works closely with the Georgia Trauma Foundation, led by Executive Director Cheryle Ward, to identify host sites, manage logistics, and promote courses. Grant management has been supported by SORH Executive Director Nita Ham and currently, SORH Program Specialist, Cole Edwards.

Courses attract a wide range of healthcare professionals, with post-course feedback shared with SORH to guide ongoing improvements. With one year of funding remaining, the program is on track for its strongest year yet as it continues to expand training access for rural providers.

Focus on Rural Health

SORH Staff Attend Inaugural No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit



Tina Register and Tiffany Hardin with the Georgia Farmworker Health Program, and Cole Edwards, SORH program operations specialist attended the No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit in February.

SORH staff attended the inaugural No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit on February 4, 2026, at the Anderson Conference Center in Macon. Attendees included Tiffany Hardin and Tina Register from the Georgia Farmworker Health Program and Cole Edwards from the SORH Program.

Hosted by No Kid Hungry Georgia and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, the summit highlighted new strategies and tools to expand access to summer meals in rural communities. Speakers from across the state shared approaches to preparing and distributing non-congregate summer meals for children when school is out.

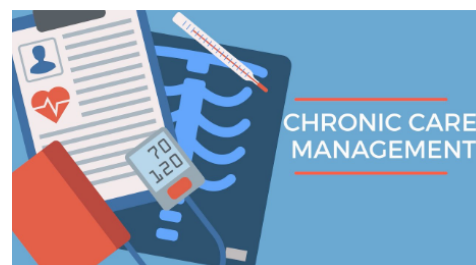
Interactive sessions gave SORH staff opportunities to connect with partners from community organizations, food banks, food pantries, and school-based summer food service programs. No Kid Hungry is a campaign that launched nationally in 2010. It aims to end childhood hunger and has helped provide more than 1 billion meals while raising awareness about barriers that keep

From Hospital Services

A Flex Grant Initiative:

Optim Medical Center – Tattnall Implements Chronic Care Management Program Positive Outcomes Include Fewer Inpatient Stays, Improved Overall Health

Chronic Care Management (CCM) improves patient outcomes by providing proactive, coordinated care for individuals with multiple chronic conditions, resulting in fewer emergency room visits, reduced hospital re-admissions, and enhanced quality of life.



Optim Medical Center – Tattnall in Reidsville recently implemented a CCM program with resources provided through the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Grant funding.

With education provided by Flex partner, HomeTown Health, (HTH), Optim Medical Center - Tattnall's program now serves 57 enrolled patients. Through the program, patients receive ongoing support, identify their needs, and connect to services and resources that can improve their health and daily well-being.

HTH reports encouraging early results as some patients have experienced fewer hospital visits and inpatient stays, and many have shown improvements in their overall health. Just as important, the program has helped build strong relationships between patients and care coordinators, giving patients a trusted point of contact for support and guidance.

Optim Medical Center-Tattnall's progress is a testament to how valuable these efforts can be for rural hospitals and the communities they serve. With continued support and collaboration, programs like Flex can make a real difference in helping patients stay healthier and more connected to the care they need.

Farmworker Program

Governance in Focus:

Georgia Farmworker Health Program Board Convenes in Cordele

The Georgia Farmworker Health Program (GFHP) Governing Board held its regular monthly meeting on January 15, 2026, at the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) in Cordele. The 19-member board, which provides oversight for healthcare services supporting Georgia's migrant and seasonal farmworkers, dedicated this session to strengthening governance practices and reinforcing organizational excellence.

A central feature of the meeting was an in-depth professional development presentation led by Brian Annino, Esq., the Department of Community Health commissioner's designee and ethics

officer. This training equipped board members with essential tools for effective leadership, focusing on three core pillars:

- Board Roles and Responsibilities - Annino outlined the legal, strategic, and fiduciary duties of the board, emphasizing how strong governance directly supports the GFHP mission.
- Robert's Rules of Order - The presentation reinforced parliamentary procedure fundamentals to help ensure meetings remain efficient, fair, and consistently structured.
- Ethics and Compliance - Board members received a detailed review of ethical standards for public officials, including transparency requirements and best practices for managing conflicts of interest in state-governed programs.

By convening at SORH, the board reaffirmed its commitment to staying connected with Georgia's agricultural communities and the farmworkers who sustain them. The training aligns with ongoing efforts to maintain a high-performing, compliant, and mission-driven program that advocates for the health needs of one of the state's most essential workforces.

The GFHP Governing Board continues to meet on the third Thursday of each month, providing consistent oversight and support for the program's statewide healthcare services.



National Health Service Corps: New Site Applications Opening This Spring



The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) will open its new site application cycle this Spring. Exact dates will be announced by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Becoming an NHSC-approved site can significantly strengthen your recruitment and retention strategy. Approved sites gain access to the Health Workforce Connector, a powerful tool for attracting highly qualified primary care providers committed to serving rural and underserved communities.

Why Become an NHSC-Approved Site?

When your site is approved:

- Primary care providers become eligible to apply for the NHSC Loan Repayment Program (LRP).
- The NHSC LRP offers:
 - Up to \$75,000 in loan repayment for a full-time, two-year service commitment
 - Up to \$37,500 for a half-time, two-year service commitment
- With continued service, NHSC LRP participants may be able to fully eliminate their student loan debt.

Learn More or Apply

Check eligibility requirements:

<https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/sites/eligibility-requirements>

- Apply to become an NHSC-approved site:
- <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/sites/how-to-apply>

You Might be Rural If...



...your first sign of Spring is a turtle sunbathing on a log!

Turtles have been around for over 200 million years, surviving alongside - and outliving - the dinosaurs. So, when you see one on a log, you're basically looking at a tiny prehistoric neighbor. Turtles "winter" in the mud. In cold rural climates, pond turtles bury themselves in the muddy bottom of ponds to survive winter. They slow their metabolism and wait out the cold like seasoned rural pros.

Pond turtles often stick to the same pond or lake for years. They're basically the long-term rural residents of the reptile world. They nest on land and females leave the water to dig nests in sunny, open rural areas like fields, pastures, and even roadside banks. They prefer quiet places with little disturbance.

They come in many "local varieties" belonging mostly to the Emydidae family, the largest and most diverse turtle family in North America. Rural ponds may host species like painted turtles, sliders, musk turtles, or even snapping turtles.

Pond turtles eat insects, snails, and other small critters helping keep rural ponds and lakes healthier. They love a good basking spot, particularly on logs and rocks. Old fence posts sticking

out of rural ponds are prime real estate. Basking helps them warm up, digest food, and stay healthy.

This tiny prehistoric fellow pictured was unfazed by boats passing by as he sunbathed on his "prime real estate" in Lake Blackshear.

Photo: Dawn Waldrip



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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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