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**January 1, 2023**

**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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## **Setting Resolutions to Make a Difference in 2023**

As we begin a new year, we should pause and reflect on what we learned last year. How did we improve ourselves, our goals, our commitments, our work, and the rural residents that we have the privilege to serve and positively impact? Making New Year's resolutions is a time-honored tradition all around the world. Those who set achievable goals, enlist others to keep them on track and form new habits, are the most successful in keeping their resolutions.

This is my list of 2023 resolutions for the State Office of Rural Health. I hope they inspire you to make resolutions that work for you. SORH resolves to:

- Improve professionalism,
- Create inspired teamwork,
- Instill a strong sense of urgency for optimal impact,
- Continue to improve processes throughout our DCH Division,
- Resolve issues that can be objectively measured,
- Create a culture of energy and passion, and
- Continue to develop and inspire staff to challenge themselves and hold themselves accountable.



Fill your resolution list with obtainable yet challenging goals that focus on meeting objectives that increase quality and access for all rural community health needs. With one small lifestyle improvement a day, you'll feel accomplished by quarter's end and be re-energized to make the most difference in 2023.

All the best,  
**Stephen Register**  
SORH Executive Director

## A Sight for "SORH" Eyes

### Cordele First United Methodist Church Recognized as Georgia's "Community Star" on National Rural Health Day



*SORH Hospital Services Director, Dawn Waldrip, (second from right) presents the Georgia Community Star Award to Cordele First United Methodist Church (FUMC) representatives pictured (L-R) Dr. David Duvall and Loida Waters who are members of the missions team, along with Tania Montero, FUMC Associate Pastor, on National Rural Health Day.*



The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) recognized the Cordele First United Methodist Church in Cordele, as Georgia's 2022 Community Star.

On the third Thursday of November, NOSORH leads National Rural Health Day (NRHD), an annual celebration that honors those serving the vital health needs of nearly 61 million rural Americans. In conjunction with NRHD, NOSORH made a nationwide call for nominations, seeking individuals, organizations, and coalitions making a positive impact in rural communities.

Cordele FUMC is featured in the 2022 edition of the *Community Star* eBook, which was made available on the official NRHD website, [PowerofRural.org](https://PowerofRural.org), on November 17, 2022. The eBook showcases the stories of Community Stars from 48 states, exemplifying 2022's

NRHD theme of “Driving Change and Going the Extra Mile.”

The Georgia State Office of Rural Health (SORH) is pleased to present the Cordele First United Methodist Church as Georgia’s Community Star for their efforts in organizing a community resource fair to address the unmet spiritual, health, dental, emotional, and physical needs of their community. The 100-year-old church and its members are driven by “radical hospitality and risk-taking mission and service.”

Cordele FUMC was nominated by Dawn Waldrip, Director of Hospital Services at the SORH, for exemplifying NOSORH’s 2022 theme of “Driving Change and Going the Extra Mile” aligning with NOSORH’s mantra to, “never underestimate that even the smallest idea has the potential to make an enormously positive impact.”

## Focus on Rural Health

### “RHS Grant Helped Us Survive” Rural Hospitals Reap Vitality from Stabilization Grants



*Project Director, Nita Ham (L) provided an overview of Phases 5, 6, and 7 of the RHS grant program to attendees at the RHS Committee meeting while Sara Dekutowski, CPA at Draffin Tucker (R), reviewed outcomes of hospitals participating in the RHS program to hospital administrators and guests attending the RHS Committee meeting.*

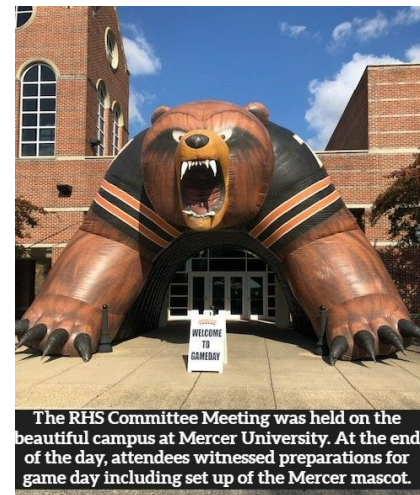


*Hospital CEOs/Administrators (L-R) LaDon Toole of Dodge County Hospital, Antione Poythress of Jenkins County Medical Center, and James Womack of Mitchell County Hospital chat during a break at the RHS Committee meeting held in the President's Dining Room at Mercer University. Each of the executive's hospitals have participated in the RHS Program.*

It was a full day of information-sharing and metrics slides at Mercer University in Macon as the State Office of Rural Health held its Rural Hospital Stabilization (RHS) Grant Program Committee Meeting. In attendance on November 3, 2022 were committee members including committee co-chair and House Appropriations Chairman Terry England, along with special guests Rep. Matt Hatchett and Dr. Jean Sumner, Dean of Mercer University School of Medicine. Chairman England, who plans to retire from the General Assembly in 2023, was recognized by Commissioner Caylee Noggle for his work as a rural health champion during his time in the legislature.

Nita Ham, SORH Programs Director and RHS Program Coordinator, and Sarah Dekutowski, CPA partner with DraffinTucker, presented program updates and reported financial outcomes data from Phase 6 of the program.

During the meeting, representatives from five hospitals who have participated in Phases 5-6 (the 7<sup>th</sup> phase was announced in July 2022) of the RHS were present to explain the importance of the RHS grant funding. They each provided examples of how they utilized



*The RHS Committee Meeting was held on the beautiful campus at Mercer University. At the end of the day, attendees witnessed preparations for game day including set up of the Mercer mascot.*

grant funding to:

- Increase market share,
- Increase access to primary care,
- Reduce avoidable hospital readmissions, and
- Reduce non-emergent care and “super users” served in emergency.

Tracie Haughey, CEO and CFO of Wills Memorial Hospital, shared how participating in the RHS Grant Program over several phases is supporting the hiring of primary care physicians for her critical access hospital in Washington, GA, about an hour southeast of Athens.

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

For more information about the RHS Grant Program, contact Nita Ham at [nham@dch.ga.gov](mailto:nham@dch.ga.gov).

## From Hospital Services

*Flex Monitoring Team Releases 2021 Annual Report:*

# Georgia Critical Access Hospitals Rank #1 Nationally in Reporting MBQIP Data

Georgia’s 30 Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) demonstrated a 100% reporting rate, ranking #1 nationally for all four required domains in the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex), Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program (MBQIP) as noted in the Flex Monitoring Team 2021 Annual Report. These four domains include: Patient Safety/Inpatient reporting, Outpatient reporting, Patient Engagement (HCAHPS) reporting, and Care Transitions (EDTC) reporting.

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) partners with the Georgia Hospital Association Research and Education Foundation (GHAREF) to provide education, extensive technical assistance, and resources for Georgia’s CAHs through the Flex program to improve reporting and performance within the four required MBQIP domains as well as several additional domains.



MBQIP focuses on quality improvement efforts in the 45 states that participate in the Flex program. Through Flex, MBQIP supports more than 1,350 small hospitals certified as rural CAHs in voluntarily reporting quality measures that are aligned with those collected by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and other federal programs.

The Flex Monitoring Team (FMT) has been producing national annual reports on quality measures for over a decade. FMT published the annual report in December 2022 focusing specifically on MBQIP measures using data collected under the four MBQIP domains. The FMT also produces state-level annual MBQIP reports found on the FMT website.

The data used for the report are reported to CMS by individual CAHs and extracted from QualityNet, or to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) annual survey. Emergency Department Transfer Communication (EDTC) data used for the report are from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) as reported by CAHs to State Flex Programs.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The FMT 2021 National Report can be viewed in its entirety as well as the Georgia 2021 Annual report by following the highlighted links here:

[2021 FMT Annual National Report](#)

[2021 FMT Georgia Annual Report](#)

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## ***A Flex Program Update:*** **Rural Emergency Hospital Model Education and Health Equity Improvement Programs Now Available**

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The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Hospital Services Director, Dawn Waldrip, is pleased to announce that in the current fiscal year of the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Program encompassing September 1, 2022, through August 31, 2023, two new programs are being offered to critical access hospitals (CAHs).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Federal Office of Rural Health Policy has provided supplemental funding in the current year Flex program for

Georgia's rural hospitals for education and technical assistance in understanding the Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) model effective January 1, 2023.

The SORH has contracted with the Georgia Hospital Association to provide a series of webinars featuring subject matter expert speakers to deliver education on the REH designation and the Center for Medicare/Medicaid (CMS) Conditions of Participation (CoP), and an overview of the economics of the REH. Hospitals interested in transforming to the REH payment model will then be referred to the National REH Technical Assistance Center for financial feasibility studies and the final application process.

Rural hospitals interested in the new model may contact either Ms. Waldrip at the SORH or Bill Wylie, Senior Vice President, Business Operations at GHA at [bwylie@gha.org](mailto:bwylie@gha.org) to participate in this education, technical assistance, and resource opportunity.

The SORH is also addressing health equity for the first time by offering a Health Equity Improvement (HEI) Project for CAHs. Rather than focus on one particular health equity topic, the program will provide for the assessment of health equity needs of Georgia CAHs and then create an action plan accordingly providing guidance and training focused on areas of need.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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# State Offices of Rural Health

25+ Years of Improving Health Care for Nearly 57 Million People in America

## What we need Congress to do:

Increase funding for the SORH Grant Program to \$15 million in FY 2023 to build capacity of SORH and their state and communities to improve rural health. The SORH Grant Program has been statutorily authorized at \$12,500,000 since FY 2018.



**FAST  
FACT**

### Wise Investment of Taxpayer Dollars

Every SORH Grant dollar is matched with \$3 in non-federal funds. The effect of the increased appropriation provides approximately \$50,000 to each of the 50 SORH. With the 3 to 1 match, that provides \$200,000 in service value to rural communities in each state!

## What does a SORH do?

- SORH are a one-stop shop for information for community leaders and healthcare providers in the nation's rural communities.
- SORH connect federal, state and local partners to grow collaborative approaches to health equity, access and leadership.
- SORH provide support to build capacity and resources to improve rural health.

## Who do they work with?

SORH provide direct technical assistance most often to:



Hospitals



Clinics



Communities



EMS agencies



Networks

## Where can the additional funds have an impact?

- **Telehealth** — to expand the use of technology to ensure access to care
- **Workforce** — to build a vital workforce and expand the capacity of primary care providers
- **Transformation** — to support model programs to grow vital systems of high value care
- **Integration** — to integrate primary care, behavioral and oral health for the diverse needs of rural children, veterans, seniors and special populations
- **Health & Health Equity** — grow leadership and collaboration to achieve health equity for all



### Ask an Expert:

**Tammy Norville** | Chief Executive Officer  
**National Organization of  
State Offices of Rural Health**  
PHONE: (888) 391-7258, ext. 105  
EMAIL: tammy@nosorh.org

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From the Primary Care Office

## SORH Primary Care Office Congratulates Primary Care Association on 45 Years of Service

The State Office of Rural Health Primary Care Office congratulates the Georgia Primary Care Association on their 45th Anniversary! Since 1977, the Georgia Primary Care Association (GPCA) has been a membership organization for all Georgia Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). In the



state of Georgia, GPCA is designated as the state Primary Care Association (PCA) and the Health Center Controlled Network (HCCN) under cooperative agreements with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The mission of the GPCA is to help ensure accessible, quality health care services for all underserved Georgians and to support continued development and expansion of community-based health centers (FQHCs) throughout the state.

The Primary Care Office works closely with the GPCA to execute state funded grants that provide for two new operational models for FQHCs or expansion of services to existing FQHCs along with funding to provide direction and leadership for required community development activities related to new as well as existing FQHCs.

Services provided to FQHCs include credentialing, emergency preparedness, Georgia family planning, Georgia HCCN, Health Information Technology, Patient Centered Medical Home learning communities, training and technical assistance, and workforce development.

[Read the full article here.](#)



## Farmworker Program

### GFHP's Tina Register Participates in Georgia Agriculture Labor Relations Forum 2022

#### 2022 GEORGIA AGRICULTURAL LABOR RELATIONS FORUM

##### THE PARTNERSHIP OF FARMWORKER HEALTH CLINICS AND AREA FARMING OPERATIONS



**Tina Register**  
Georgia Department  
of Community Health



**Courtney Hamilton**  
Southern Valley  
Fruit & Vegetable Inc.

[WWW.GEORGIAAGLABORFORUM.COM](http://WWW.GEORGIAAGLABORFORUM.COM)

The Georgia Agriculture (Ag) Labor Relations Forum was held in Tifton, on November 9-10, 2022, at Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College's (ABAC) Georgia Museum of Agriculture. The annual forum presented two full days of updates for agricultural employers and discussion with regulators and leading experts from the ag labor industry.

The format and design of the event allows ag employers, human resource managers and administrators to have active discussions on how to navigate the ever-evolving challenge of finding and maintaining a consistent workforce in a complex regulatory environment.

Chris Butts of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association noted the importance of the forum is to present ag employers with a unique opportunity to hear directly from regulators, fellow business owners, labor attorneys, and labor consultants. Presenters are recognized leaders in helping employers understand complex compliance and regulatory issues.

Ag employers use this information to provide safe and healthy work environments and to ensure they are meeting the needs of both domestic and guest workers. "If the success of your ag business depends on a consistent and reliable workforce, this forum will help you in that quest," Butts said.

The conference is made possible each year by the support of groups representing the wide variety of food and fiber produced and processed by Georgia's leading industry, agriculture. Butts stated, "the partners that make this event possible are names we know and trust and represent a broad mix of industry segments."

[Read the full article here.](#)

To learn more about the Georgia Farmworker Health Program, go to our website [here](#).

# You Might be Rural If...



***...a majestic courthouse is the focal point of your town square.***

The Talbot County Courthouse, on Courthouse Square in Talbotton, Georgia, is a brick county courthouse that was built in 1892. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, it was designed by architects Bruce & Morgan in Queen Anne style and is smaller and more picturesque than many of their courthouses.

Interestingly, 46 years prior to the building of the courthouse at Talbotton, on Jan. 26, 1846, the first meeting of the Supreme Court of Georgia was held in the dining hall of the old Claiborne Hotel which stood one block west of the courthouse grounds.

Fifteen attorneys were admitted to the Supreme Court during the term held at Talbotton in January 1846. The first lawyers in Georgia to qualify to practice before Georgia's highest court were: Alfred Iverson, Hines Holt, James Johnson, Marcus Johnston and Adam G. Foster of Columbus; Barnard Hill, Allen F. Owen, Edmund H. Worrill, William F. Brooks, Anthony G. Perryman, Levi B. Smith, Stephen D. Heard, Marion Bethune, and J.L. Stephenson of Talbotton; and Amos W. Hammond of





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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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