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$1.67 Million Awarded to Strengthen Rural Healthcare Networks Across the Northern Border Region

Fourteen projects will support healthcare collaboration, improve access to services, and strengthen rural health systems across Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

CONCORD, NH – The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is pleased to announce that $1.67 million in federal funding has been awarded to 14 organizations working to strengthen healthcare networks and improve access to care in rural communities across Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

The awards are made possible through NBRC's partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), through the Rural Northern Border Region Network Planning (RNBR-NP) Program. The RNBR-NP Program supports the creation of new healthcare partnerships and the strengthening of existing networks to improve access to care, enhance care coordination, increase efficiency, and build stronger rural healthcare systems throughout the Northern Border Region.

The 14 selected projects address a range of regional healthcare needs, including pediatric specialty care, maternal health, behavioral health, oral health, primary care access, early childhood development, housing and healthcare coordination, and shared healthcare infrastructure. Through collaborative planning, these projects will help participating organizations identify service gaps, develop coordinated approaches to care, and establish strategies to sustain improvements beyond the grant period.

"Adequate access to health care is a critical component of a healthy rural economy. These partnership awards will help expand access and close gaps within the existing health care system across the NBRC region," said **Chris Saunders, NBRC's Federal Co-Chair**.

HRSA works with regional partners such as NBRC to strengthen rural healthcare systems, expand access to quality services, and address disparities affecting underserved populations. By supporting collaborative planning and sustainable partnerships, the RNBR-NP Program helps rural communities develop the infrastructure and relationships needed to improve healthcare access and outcomes over the long term

Each recipient will receive $119,705 to support a one-year planning project designed to build partnerships, improve coordination, and develop sustainable approaches to addressing rural healthcare challenges. Fourteen grants, totaling $1,675,870, have been awarded to the following projects:

Maine

MaineHealth — Planning a Multi-Institutional Clinic-to-Clinic Pediatric Specialty Care Network

MaineHealth will develop a collaborative network connecting rural clinics with pediatric specialists through hybrid visits that combine in-person care with specialist consultations by videoconference. The project will assess community needs, establish a network advisory board, and develop an evaluation and sustainability plan to improve access to pediatric specialty care in Maine and New Hampshire.

United Way, Inc. — 211 Maine HARBOR Project (Health Access and Resource Benefits Outreach and Referral)

United Way of Southern Maine will strengthen coordination between rural healthcare providers and 211 Maine to help residents navigate healthcare, MaineCare, SNAP, and other community resources amid anticipated changes to public benefit eligibility. The project will develop referral processes, training resources, decision-support tools, and a sustainable implementation plan to improve access to benefits navigation and community services.

The Harry E. Davis Partnership for Children’s Oral Health — Maine Dental Triage and Referral Network

The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine and its partners will develop a coordinated screening, triage, and referral system to help children access appropriate dental care across 13 eligible rural counties. The project will establish standardized screening guidelines, referral workflows, information-sharing procedures, and a shared directory of dental providers and available capacity.

New Hampshire

The Women of the Mountains Birth (WOMB) Initiative

The WOMB Initiative will strengthen maternal healthcare access in northern and rural New Hampshire by developing a sustainable network of community-based birth workers and regional healthcare partners. Plans include establishing a doula peer mentorship network and a centralized nonprofit hub to support administration, billing, referrals, and connections to prenatal and postpartum services.

Families Flourish Northeast, Inc. — Families Flourish Northeast Recovery Network Initiative

Families Flourish Northeast will develop a coordinated, family-centered healthcare network for pregnant and parenting women affected by substance use disorders in rural New Hampshire and Vermont. The project will establish shared referral pathways, clinical triage, and care coordination while developing the operational and financial infrastructure needed to support a planned residential treatment program where mothers can remain with their children during treatment.

New York

University of Rochester — FLH Rural Primary Care Expansion Project

The University of Rochester will plan for the establishment of three new primary care sites in Newark, Lyons, and Ovid to expand access to care in underserved rural communities in eastern Wayne and southern Seneca counties. The project will combine on-site clinicians with virtual care management and specialist access, with a particular focus on cancer screening, early diagnosis, and improved access to health information and services.

Wayne County Action Program, Inc. — Wayne County Rural Early Childhood Health and Development Network Planning Project

Wayne County Action Program will develop a coordinated network to improve developmental screening, referrals, family navigation, and follow-up for children ages 12–60 months in rural Wayne County. Partners will map existing services, strengthen communication and data-sharing, and establish shared procedures to better connect families with health, developmental, disability, and community services.

Western New York Rural Area Health Education Center, Inc. — Regional Health Data Infrastructure Plan

Western New York Rural Area Health Education Center will lead a regional planning effort to improve how healthcare providers, public health agencies, and community organizations collect, manage, and share health and workforce data across Genesee, Orleans, and Wyoming counties. The project will assess existing data resources and gaps, develop data-sharing standards and governance policies, and design a regional performance dashboard to support coordinated planning and improved healthcare access.

Vermont

Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital, Inc. — Northeast Kingdom Accountable Community for Health (ACH) Regionalization Initiative

Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital, North Country Hospital, and regional partners will expand the existing St. Johnsbury Health Service Area ACH, NEK Prosper! to include the Newport

Health Service Area. The project will establish a unified regional structure across Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties, with shared health priorities, governance, partnerships, infrastructure, and a sustainability plan to strengthen coordination among healthcare, behavioral health, and social service organizations.

Lamoille Community House, Inc. — Housing and Healthcare Initiative

Lamoille Community House and the Lamoille Valley Housing and Homelessness Coalition will develop a strategic plan to improve healthcare access and housing stability for people experiencing homelessness in rural Lamoille County. The project will identify service gaps and coordinate healthcare providers, housing organizations, local government, and community partners to develop practical solutions and sustainable strategies for implementation.

Green Mountain Birth Center, Inc. — Vermont Rural Midwifery Access & Workforce Network

Green Mountain Birth Center will strengthen access to coordinated, community-based maternity care across Lamoille, Washington, Orleans, Essex, and Caledonia counties. Planning activities will include a regional maternal health needs assessment, workforce and referral coordination, governance and sustainability planning, and accreditation readiness to support Vermont's first freestanding birth center.

Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Inc. — Rural Resource Hub Network

Northeast Kingdom Community Action and Rural Resource Network partners will develop a shared-service model using NEKCA's facility in Canaan to better serve rural and aging residents in northern Essex County. The project will explore how community organizations can coordinate services addressing housing, food access, healthcare, and other social determinants of health while sustaining regular, in-person access to essential resources.

Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region, Inc. — Closed-Loop Referral Coordination Model

Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region, Rutland Regional Medical Center, and the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging will design an interoperable referral coordination system for rural Rutland County. The project will assess existing referral workflows, develop standardized processes and data-sharing arrangements, explore technology and automation options, and pilot improved tracking to reduce referral breakdowns and help patients access specialty care.

Behavioral Health Network of Vermont, Inc. — ACCESS VT Shared Services Initiative

ACCESS VT will develop a shared-services model across the Vermont Care Partners network which includes 16 state-designated agencies providing mental health, substance use, and intellectual and development disability services. to improve the efficiency and sustainability of rural community-based mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services. The project will assess administrative, workforce, technology, and financial needs and evaluate opportunities for shared recruitment, workforce development, clinical leadership, and data systems.

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About the NBRC

Created in 2008, the Northern Border Regional Commission is a federal-state partnership whose mission is to catalyze community vitality and economic prosperity in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont through flexible funding and strategic support.

About Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)

HRSA collaborates with regional partners like the Northern Border Regional Commission to expand access to high-quality healthcare and services in underserved areas to address healthcare disparities, improve health outcomes, and strengthen local health systems, ensuring residents in these rural communities receive the care they need. Learn more online at https://www.hrsa.gov/