



## RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMISSION

NEBRASKA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH  
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### **DRAFT** MINUTES of the

#### **Rural Health Advisory Commission (RHAC)**

**Friday August 15, 2025**

**1:30 p.m. – 3:05 p.m.**

**Nebraska State Office Building**

**Lower Level Goldenrod Conference Room**

**301 Centennial Mall South**

**Lincoln, Nebraska**

#### **1. Call Meeting to Order; Open Meetings Act and Agenda Posted/Available for Download; Adopt Agenda; Approve Minutes from June 11, 2025 Meeting**

Chairman Marty Fattig called the quarterly meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. with the following members present: Marty Fattig; Kate Hesser, M.D.; Kate Kusek, D.D.S.; Myra Stoney; Roger Wells, PA-C; Diva Wilson, M.D.; Rebecca Schroeder, Ph.D.

Mr. Fattig announced that the meeting notice had been posted to the DHHS website and sent out via email and USPS on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.\* Additionally, the Open Meetings Act and meeting agenda were posted outside the meeting room.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. moved to approve the August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting agenda with the removal of item 5B “Medicaid Report” and Roger Wells, PA-C. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Roger Wells, PA-C moved to approve the June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting minutes, and Kate Hesser, M.D. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

#### **2. Administrative Items**

##### *Current Members Status Updates*

Members with Terms expiring September 2025:

- o Marty Fattig – will not be returning
- o April Dexter – has applied
- o Kate Hesser – has applied
- o Kate Kusek – has applied
- o Myra Stoney – has applied

Marty Fattig has discussed the position with another rural hospital administrator who may apply.

### *Update on Applicants for 2 Vacant Positions*

Two applications were submitted for the vacant rural resident position last summer. At least one application was submitted for the vacant nursing home administrator position in May. None of these applicants have been approved by the governor's office and there are no additional updates at this time. Heidi Peirce will follow up with DHHS leadership to gain clarity on the issue.

### **3. Proposal for an LLC to Provide Match for Loan Repayment Recipient**

Nate Liberty contacted Rachael Wolfe with the Office of Rural Health to ask about the program and to see whether it would be possible for the business he owns to provide match for him. While it's allowable for an LLC to provide matching funds, it is not the standard practice, so the commission needs to approve it.

Mr. Liberty presented to the commission about his history in the area and plans for a pharmacy, asking them to approve this. They discussed the importance of rural pharmacists.

Kate Hesser, M.D. stepped out.

Roger Wells, PA-C moved to allow Nate Liberty's LLC to provide matching funds for loan repayment on his behalf for the purposes of participating in the Nebraska State Loan Repayment program. Myra Stoney seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Hesser, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

### **4. Office of Rural Health Update**

Heidi Peirce then gave an update on the Office of Rural Health (ORH) activities.

#### *National Rural Health Day*

National Rural Health Day is November 20th this year. It was created by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) to highlight the unique healthcare challenges rural communities face, celebrate the "power of rural," and recognize the dedicated providers, community leaders, and organizations that serve these areas.

Typical themes include:

- Access to care in remote areas
- Innovation in rural health services
- Collaboration between local, state, and national partners
- Recognition of rural healthcare champions

This year to celebrate National Rural Health Day, the Office of Rural Health is working with the Governor's Office for a proclamation signing at the Capitol. It is tentatively set for 9:00 am on November 4th. There can be up to 15 people in attendance. There are 8 people in ORH, so we can include up to 7 RHAC members. We realize that the RHAC meeting is later in the week (hybrid) and may cause some not to be able to come. There are limited times as to when these signings occur, and this time was chosen for the proclamation.

Kate Hesser, M.D. reentered the room at 1:54pm.

#### *NHSC NE State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP)*

SLRP is a HRSA-funded (federally-funded) student loan repayment program that is administered through our office. It is run by Jok Akech, and its 3-year grant cycle ends August 30th. Typically, in early 2025, we should have received a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) from HRSA to reapply for another 3- year period. Due to administration changes, many of the regular activities with grants are no longer "regular". Right around mid-July, this program finally released the Notice of Funding Opportunity with some noticeable differences.

1) Due date to submit the grant is mid-January.

2) Start date will not be until July 1, 2026, so the period of performance is changing, and there is a 10-month gap in funding.

Because of this, this program would have about 35 contracts to health providers not funded for 10 months. We still have some details to hammer out, but we have been able to put together enough funds until June 30, 2026, so there is no pause

in funding to these health care providers. Unlike the state program that you know so well, this program allows for a 1- or 2-year extension.

We are not sure if we will have funds for extensions prior to July 1, 2026, and there will be no new contracts until the starting date when the funds are made available again in July 2026. We are so grateful for the support in our agency to continue these contracts.

Went from 50 million to 20 million (total available funds for new grant period)

#### *Transformation Act (Agenda item 4)*

The Rural Health Transformation Act has recently been released as part of the “One Big Beautiful Bill” or OB3. Congressional members in rural areas were concerned about OB3 and how the Medicaid reductions would affect rural hospitals. As a result the Rural Health Transformation Act was created. It is a total of 50 Billion Dollars over 5 years. The handout most recently distributed by NRHA was distributed at this meeting.

Marty Fattig mentioned that the Nebraska Hospital Association (NHA) has a team in place working on this and that they will be meeting with the governor. He wanted to make sure ORH is communicating with them.

Roger Wells, PA-C asked if this commission should write requesting additional funds for our program.

Marty Fattig did not think so, as he stated that this money is likely to go to hospitals and clinics. He did say loan repayment without match is still being proposed and would be of benefit - especially for behavioral health.

Diana Meadors (for Thomas Janousek, PsyD) entered the room at 2:11pm.

## **5. Rural Health Systems and Professional Incentive Act Program Updates**

#### *Report on ARPA Funds – Emily Lux - see handout (Agenda Item 5A).*

ARPA had a higher rate of behavioral health and dental participants than the standard program. None of these providers defaulted, and the total default rate for ARPA is lower than the standard program.

Let the minutes show that the commission thanked Emily for her work on this program and for the Office of Rural Health.

#### *Medicaid Report*

This item was moved to the next meeting.

#### *Medically Underserved Governor’s Shortage Areas*

An updated map was presented for the commission’s information by Brittany Tran. It does not require a vote or approval. Brittany stated that a couple counties became eligible and a couple counties are no longer eligible. Phelps and Red Willow are now eligible, while Cuming and Nemaha are no longer eligible.

#### *Shortage area requests (Agenda item 5D)*

Rachael Wolfe drafted updated guidelines for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists and CRNAs.

She asked RHAC members to look at emails from 1 CRNA at Methodist Fremont Health in Dodge County (federal only shortage area) and 2 CRNAs in Hall County (federal only shortage area) – they state that the areas around them do qualify, though fully staffed. Ms. Wolfe remarked that the commission could make federally-designated counties and NHSC sites automatically qualify in order to address this issue.

This wording was included in the draft guidelines (and matches what is done for family medicine):

“Service areas designated as federal primary care shortage areas or federal maternity care target areas (MCTAs) will be designated as state shortage areas for purposes of the Nebraska Rural Health Incentive Programs.”

Currently there are 5 pending CRNA applications (all incomplete); four in Platte county, one in Phelps. CRNA location data will be available in October and that may shed some light on the issue as well. If too many applications are received, the commission could rank them based on facility details at that point.

*Public comment was moved up as members of the public were present to whom this matter pertained.*

Payton Freeman, CRNA (2700 W Norfolk Ave, Norfolk, NE 68701) remarked that it would take ten CRNA's to be fully staffed for them; they are at four. Staff is primarily made up of locums. It's hard to get people to come if they're not already from the area. They do have an OB GYN program that they provide services to.

Roger Wells, PA-C asked how call is handled. Ms. Freeman replied that locums are taking first call, and the other four providers are doing second call, otherwise there wouldn't be enough staff for operating rooms.

Mr. Wells asked about the percentage of OB staff compared to other areas. She's not sure.

Britain Moffet, CRNA (2700 W Norfolk Ave, Norfolk, NE 68701) replied that there are 6 or 7 OB Gyns and that they probably do more obstetrics than general surgery on a weekly basis.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. remarked that the hospital probably draws 15 counties and Ms. Moffet affirmed that statement.

Discussion of Agenda Item 5D resumed.

Rebecca Schroeder, Ph.D. moved to approve the state shortage area guidelines for registered dietitian nutritionists (with the understanding that only medical nutrition therapists will qualify, as this is the license you get). Myra Stoney seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder.

ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. moved to approve the state shortage area guidelines for certified registered nurse anesthetists. Roger Wells, PA-C seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

This will add federal shortage areas

#### *Budget Update*

Fiscal Year 2025-26; July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026 – first year of new biennium:

Total allocation = \$2,180,723

General Funds Obligated FY25-26 (total):

\$1.6 million

New applications will add about \$70,000 to the budget for FY25-26

General Funds Remaining for FY25-26:

\$550,000 (or \$480,000 with new applications).

This amount can be carried over or used for SLRP match.

## **6. Review Current Federal and State Legislative Activities Impacting Rural Health**

Marty Fattig remarked that the Transformation Act is the major item, as discussed earlier.

He then discussed a provider assessment program that is being put into place as Nebraska is one of the only two states that does not currently have one. This program serves as a way to attract more federal dollars for Medicaid expenses. Along with Transformation Act, this will put Nebraska in a more solid place – but only for a few years.

Roger Wells, PA-C seconded this.

## **7. Public Comment**

No additional public comment.

## 8. CLOSED SESSION

Kate Hesser, M.D. moved to go to Closed Session for the purpose of review and discussion of accounts receivable, loan repayment program applications, and other confidential information, and for the prevention of needless injury to the reputation of the individuals. Kate Kusek, D.D.S. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Kusek, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Chairman Marty Fattig announced that the Commission would go into Closed Session at 3:00 p.m.

*It was announced that guests should leave the room and the Webex.*

## 9. OPEN SESSION

The Commission returned to Open Session at 3:04pm

Myra Stoney moved to approve the loan repayment applications with estimated loan repayment start dates and loan repayment amounts as indicated or as determined by Office of Rural Health staff, based on issuance of license and/or loan documentation, practice time in the shortage area, and the availability of funds for the state match, and also to approve action discussed during the accounts receivable portion. Rebecca Schroeder, Ph.D. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Fattig, Hesser, Stoney, Wells, Wilson, Schroeder. ABSTAIN: Kusek. EXCUSED: Dexter, Harrison, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Date application submitted	First Name:	Last Name:	Profession/Specialty	License Number OR date you will be licensed:	Name of Main Facility	County	Average Weekly Hours TOTAL	Average Weekly ER Hours	Date of Practice	Loan Balance	Match Funds	State Start Date:	State Award Amount:	SLRP Start Date:	SLRP Minimum Award Amount:	SLRP Maximum Award Amount:
6/17/2025	Kara	Burken	Nurse Practitioner, Family Practice	115198	Webster County Clinic	Webster	40	16	4/1/2024	\$ 55,980.00	\$ 5,250.00	10/1/2025	\$ 31,500.00	7/1/2026	\$ 21,000.00	\$ 42,000.00
6/18/2025	Ian	Ahrens	Physician Assistant, Family Practice	2797	Legend Buttes Health Services	Dawes	20	0	9/1/2022	\$127,350.46	\$ 8,000.00	7/1/2026	\$ 42,000.00	7/1/2026	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
6/19/2025	Danielle	Baker	Physician Assistant, General Internal Medicine	2822	Grand Island Health Center, Nebraska Medicine	Hall	40	0	6/9/2025	\$151,828.02	\$15,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 90,000.00			
6/25/2025	Zachary	Wordekemper	MD/DO, Family Practice	32920	Franciscan Healthcare West Point Clinic	Cuming	40	0	8/23/2022	\$ 90,283.97	\$30,000.00			9/1/2025	\$ 65,283.84	\$ -
6/28/2025	Kathryn	Placzek	Masters Level Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW),	4101	Columbus Community Hospital	Platte	40	0	4/14/2025	\$ 81,440.32	\$12,500.00			9/1/2025	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 81,440.32
6/30/2025	Alicia	Mueller	Nurse Practitioner, Psychiatry	115440	Midtown Health Center	Madison	24	0	10/22/2024	\$ 17,505.39	\$15,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 17,505.38	9/1/2025	\$ 17,505.28	\$ -
7/1/2025	Zachary	Lippert	Nurse Practitioner, Family Practice	8/1/2025	Avera Creighton Hospital	Knox	48	48	9/1/2025	\$104,319.21	\$15,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 90,000.00			
7/2/2025	Jessica	Sotelo	Licensed Mental Health Professional,	2900	Midtown Health Center	Madison	40	0	6/22/2022	\$ 31,159.39	\$15,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 31,159.38	9/1/2025	\$ 25,000.00	\$ -
7/10/2025	Krystal	Novotny	Registered Nurse (Bachelor's level or higher),	84496	VCHS Medical Clinic - Ord	Valley, Sherman, Garfield, Custer	40	0	6/2/2021	\$ 32,368.07	\$ 5,000.00			9/1/2025	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 32,368.07
7/16/2025	Nicholas	Distefano	MD/DO, Psychiatry	34563	Methodist Fremont Health	Dodge	40	5	9/30/2024	\$323,146.94	\$30,000.00	10/1/2025	\$180,000.00			
7/31/2025	Mackenzie	Pospisil	Nurse Practitioner, Family Practice	116104	Midtown Health Center	Madison	40	0	6/22/2022	\$ 82,503.48	\$15,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 82,503.48	7/1/2026	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 82,503.48
8/13/2025	Tiffany	Rice	Nurse Practitioner, Family Practice	116237	Osmond General Hospital	Peirce, Cedar	40	5	9/1/2025	\$ 38,366.27	\$10,000.00	10/1/2025	\$ 38,366.26			
8/15/2025	Eusdalis	Mendez Toledo	DDS/DMD, General Dentistry	8131	Heartland Health Center	Adams	40	0	8/18/2025	\$455,855.12	\$20,000.00	10/1/2025	\$120,000.00	7/1/2026	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 160,000.00

*Note: If award amount is blank for a particular program, provider does not qualify for that program. If \$- is listed for SLRP maximum amount, total award is for two years only.*

## 10. Adjourn

The final RHAC meeting of the year is November 7<sup>th</sup>. It will take place in Lincoln or on Webex for members and the public. Meetings for 2026 will be scheduled at the November meeting.

The Commission adjourned at 3:05 p.m.