RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMISSION

NEBRASKA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH
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DRAFT MINUTES of the

Rural Health Advisory Commission (RHAC)

Friday, November 6, 2026
1:34 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.
NSOB Lower Level Goldenrod Room
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, Nebraska

And Teams for Members of the Public

1. **Call Meeting to Order; Open Meetings Act and Agenda Posted; Adopt Agenda.**
   Chair Jeffrey Harrison, M.D. called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. with the following members present: April Dexter, N.P.; Kate Hesser, M.D.; Jeffrey Harrison, M.D.; Kate Kusek, D.D.S.; Rebecca Schroeder, Ph.D.; Myra Stoney; Jim Ulrich; Diva Wilson, M.D.; and Tracy Zamora.

   Dr. Harrison invited Commission members and Office of Rural Health (ORH) staff to introduce themselves. Public attendees were not asked to introduce themselves but were informed they may speak during the public comment period after providing their name and address (business address acceptable).

   Dr. Harrison confirmed the meeting notice was posted to the DHHS website and distributed via email and USPS on October 23, 2026*. The Open Meetings Act and meeting agenda were posted outside the meeting room. Handouts were available on site and online.

   Kate Hesser, M.D. moved to approve the November 6, 2026, meeting agenda and Kate Kusek, D.D.S. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

   Rebecca Schroeder, Ph.D. moved to approve the August 14, 2026, meeting minutes and Myra Stoney seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

2. **Administrative Items**
   Rachael Wolfe stated that the Rural Physician Assistant position is still vacant. A press release went out in September, and an email was sent to rural hospitals and clinics referencing the press release in October.

**Sent as usual to: NE Rural Hospital CEOs, NE Certified Rural Health Clinic Directors, NE Local Public Health Departments, NE Community Action Partners, NE Community Health Centers/FQHCs, NE Professional Associations/ Organizations, NE State Senators, the Offices of the Governor and Lt. Governor, and other rural interested parties and groups.*

The membership list on the website has been updated with correct indication of terms, and no member is due for reappointment at this time.

Nominate and Vote for Chair and Vice-Chair
Kate Kusek, D.D.S. moved to nominate Jeffrey Harrison, M.D. as Chair; Kate Hesser, M.D. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: Harrison. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. moved to nominate Kate Hesser, M.D. as Vice-Chair; Jim Ulrich seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: Hesser. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Set Meeting Dates for 2027
Note: half of the meetings in a calendar year can be held via videoconference. If any commission member attends virtually, the meeting counts as a videoconference. One meeting must be held outside of Lincoln and Omaha.

- Meeting in Lincoln (NSOB or videoconference) - February 12th
- Possible rural location - June 9th
    - Annual Nebraska Rural Health Conference on June 10th-11th in Kearney
- Meeting in Lincoln (NSOB lower level) - August 13th
- Meeting in Lincoln (NSOB or videoconference) - November 5th

ORH will send out invites and reserve rooms.

3. Crete Family Medicine Residency Program
Julie Lacy, CEO of Crete Area Medical Center (CAMC), presented information about a grant awarded to CAMC through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to establish a Family Medicine Residency Program. The program will be developed in partnership with Bryan Medical Center and Lincoln Medical Education Partnership (LMEP). Discussion emphasized the importance of obstetrical training, and commission members noted that its inclusion in the residency curriculum is a valuable component of the program.

4. Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) Update
Sara Morgan, Deputy Director for Health Promotion and Prevention, reported several key developments since the previous Commission meeting:

- CMS has released state data maps, and Nebraska continues to outperform many states in implementation efforts.
- Budget Period 1 concluded on August 30th. All available funds were obligated and have either been distributed or are currently in the distribution process.
- The RHTP dashboard is updated monthly and reflects funding obligations across Nebraska.
- The award amount for Budget Period 2 has not yet been announced.
- Sara highlighted the Nebraska Tech Catalyst Fund (Initiative 7), a public-private partnership that supports startup innovation projects. Applications are open through November 9, and the initiative is being implemented in partnership with healthcare advisory regions statewide.

Oral Health Initiative Discussion
At the request of RHAC member Myra Stoney, Ms. Morgan provided an update on oral health initiatives, explaining that the initiatives include several strategies aimed at improving access to dental care:

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- Community Health Workers (CHWs) are being paired with public health dental hygienists to deliver services in community settings, including local health departments.
- Partnerships with colleges of dentistry are expanding opportunities for dental students to gain experience in rural communities.
- Four free clinics across Nebraska are providing basic dental services to uninsured individuals with support from volunteer dentists, dental students, and dental hygienists.

Kate Hesser, M.D. asked how these services would be publicized. Megan McGuffey, Ph.D., Program Administrator for the Rural Health Transformation Program, responded that outreach plans are still being finalized and that local health departments will serve as primary partners for community engagement. Ms. Morgan noted that Dr. Charles Craft and Jessica Ball are leading the initiative and that implementation approaches will vary by community.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. commented positively on the initiative and expressed support for the program.

Future RHTP Workforce Incentive Program Funding
Jim Ulrich asked whether changes are anticipated for the next RHTP funding cycle.

Ms. Morgan explained that plans for Cohort 2 are still under development and that stakeholder feedback is actively being solicited. She encouraged members to submit recommendations for consideration.

She noted that:

- More than 9,000 applications were received during the previous funding cycle.
- Slightly more than 200 awards were granted.
- Due to the high demand, the state is considering narrowing the program's focus and reducing the number of eligible provider types.

Application and Award Process
RHAC member April Dexter, N.P. asked whether applicants who were not selected for funding would receive notification.

Ms. Morgan confirmed that notification letters will be issued. She explained that program staff have prioritized obligating all awarded funds by October 30th and communicating with successful applicants, including filling vacancies created when some awardees declined participation. Notifications to unsuccessful applicants are currently being prepared.

Additional clarifications included:

- All applicants, including previous applicants, must submit a new application for the next funding cycle.
- Medicaid eligibility requirements will remain unchanged, although calculations involving dual-eligible patients are still being finalized.
- Award recipients must complete a five-year service commitment, with payments distributed annually.
- CMS requires Nebraska to maintain all seven major initiatives outlined in the grant throughout the life of the program.

National Rural Health Day
Rachael Wolfe provided an update on plans for National Rural Health Day, which will be observed on Thursday, November 19, 2026, marking its 15th anniversary.

Resources are available through the following organizations and campaigns:

- National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH): https://nosorh.org/nrhd/
- Power of Rural Campaign: https://www.powerofrural.org/

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The ORH will host a chili cookoff in recognition of National Rural Health Day and will distribute materials available through the NOSORH website.

Heidi Peirce encouraged commission members to use materials from the National Rural Health Day marketing toolkit to help promote and celebrate rural health. She noted that NOSORH offers three webinars during the week of the 19th that could be shared and promoted by members. Ms. Peirce also reported that NOSORH representatives will be on Capitol Hill during that week and noted that Nebraska received a proclamation recognizing National Rural Health Day last year.

Ms. Wolfe will provide an update on the chili cookoff and announce the winner at the February 2027 Commission meeting.

5. Office of Rural Health Update (ORH)

Heidi Peirce reported that Nancy Jo Hansen, Program Coordinator for the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (FLEX) Program and State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), retired on Tuesday. The office is currently conducting interviews to fill the position.

6. Rural Health Systems and Professional Incentive Act Program

Shortage Area Requests

No shortage area requests were presented.

Budget Update

FY 2026–27 (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027)

- Total allocation: $1,680,723, representing a 22% decrease from the prior year.
- Total available funds, including carryover: just over $2 million
- General funds obligated: $1.84 million
- Remaining general funds: $177,000
- Pending applications are expected to add approximately $85,000 to the amount obligated this fiscal year

Overall Outlook

- Transfers to the RHTP-funded program have freed up some funds.
- After funding pending applications, approximately $90,000 in FY 2026-27 funds is expected to remain available; however, general funds for FY 2027-28 are projected to be over-obligated.
- Approximately $55,000 in cash funds generated through default payments will be needed to supplement general funds in FY 2027-28.
- Prioritization criteria are in place, and a waiting list has been established.
- New awards are unlikely to be issued before FY 2027-28.

RHAC 2026 Annual Report and Distribution

Jim Ulrich moved to approve the Rural Health Advisory Commission's 2026 Annual Report, with updated maps to be added to the report after today's meeting, and agreed that the Chair would distribute the Annual Report with a cover letter from the Commission to the following individuals/groups: Governor, Lt. Governor, all State Senators, Nebraska's Congressional representatives, and DHHS' Directors. April Dexter, N.P. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

The 2026 Annual Report will be added to the webpage that ORH maintains for the Commission, replacing prior versions. A final version will be emailed to RHAC members as well. If any physical copies are desired, ORH can assist with printing these documents.

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7. **Member Reports and Discussion**

Commission members provided brief updates on issues affecting rural health and healthcare delivery in Nebraska.

Myra Stoney reported that local health departments continue to work on legislation related to community health workers.

Jim Ulrich shared that, from the hospital perspective, current priorities include protecting the 340B Drug Pricing Program in partnership with the Nebraska Hospital Association and supporting the State Directed Payment Program. He noted that the State Directed Payment Program is relatively new and could become a target during budget-balancing discussions. Mr. Ulrich emphasized the importance of both programs to the financial stability of small rural hospitals.

Jeffrey Harrison, M.D. asked whether there are actions the Rural Health Advisory Commission (RHAC) should be taking to address these issues.

In response, Ms. Stoney commented that access to healthcare is sometimes treated as a political issue, although it directly affects rural residents' well-being. She expressed concern about potential Medicaid changes, including work requirements, and emphasized the importance of ensuring that individuals who need care can access services, particularly in rural communities where barriers already exist.

Dr. Harrison stated that distributing the Annual Report with a cover letter helps reinforce the importance of RHAC's work on behalf of Nebraska citizens and the healthcare system. He noted that maintaining access to care and supporting local healthcare services are essential priorities. Dr. Harrison suggested that the proposed cover letter could be distributed to RHAC members for approval through an email ballot. He further observed that both long travel distances for care and the inability to afford needed services create significant barriers to healthcare access in rural areas.

8. **Public Comment**

Senator Dan Lonowski of Hastings joined the meeting and shared observations from his community perspective. He noted that many people take rural healthcare services for granted and expressed his interest in learning more about current rural health issues and challenges facing communities across the state. Mr. Lonowski reported receiving numerous calls from families concerned about changes to Medicaid coverage, particularly those caring for children who require 24-hour care. He stated that many families are worried about what will happen when these children age out of existing programs or services. He emphasized that accessing specialized services and supports is often more difficult in rural areas, where resources may be limited.

Mr. Lonowski further noted that many caregivers face the challenge of balancing full-time employment with the substantial demands of caring for a child with complex healthcare needs. He acknowledged the difficult policy discussions surrounding budget constraints and the need to consider where funding reductions may occur while minimizing impacts on vulnerable populations.

9. **Closed Session**

Diva Wilson, 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 Hesser, M.D. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Jeffrey Harrison, M.D. announced that the Commission would go into Closed Session at 2:27 p.m.

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10. Open Session

The Commission returned to Open Session at 2:44 p.m.

Kate Kusek, D.D.S. 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. April Dexter, N.P. seconded the motion. Deb Stoltenberg initiated roll call vote. YES: Dexter, Hesser, Harrison, Kusek, Schroeder, Stoney, Ulrich, Wilson, Zamora. ABSTAIN: None. EXCUSED: Brockhaus, Janousek, Tesmer. Motion carried.

Record ID	Date application submitted	Name	Profession /Specialty	License Number OR Date You Will Be Licensed	County /Counties	Date of Practice:	Loan Balance	Matching Funds	State Start Date:	State Award Amount:	SLRP Start Date:	SLRP Minimum Award Amount:	SLRP Maximum Award Amount:
1014	9/21/2026	Katelyn Richardson	Pharmacist	19068	Thayer	7/29/2026	$ 84,577.41	$ 25,000.00			7/1/2028	$ 50,000.00	$ 84,577.41
800	10/29/2026	Oliver Ramirez-Gutierrez	Registered Nurse (Bachelor's level or higher)	94366	Douglas	2/23/2022	$ 40,868.10	$ 12,500.00			7/1/2028	$ 25,000.00	$ -
961	8/17/2026	Miah Wiebelhaus	Nurse Practitioner, Family Med	116640	Rock, Holt (Site-Specific)	9/1/2026	$ 53,519.28	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 53,519.28	7/1/2028	$ 31,250.00	$ 53,519.28
1003	8/26/2026	Samantha Karr	Nurse Practitioner, Family Med	117054	Hamilton	9/1/2026	$ 109,584.35	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 90,000.00			
1005	8/31/2026	Mandy McCarthy	Nurse Practitioner, Family Med	116894	Hamilton	9/1/2026	$ 166,000.00	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 90,000.00			
1009	9/10/2026	Nathan Liberty	Pharmacist	18935	Saline	7/1/2026	$ 342,288.97	$ 25,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 150,000.00			
1010	9/18/2026	Jaden Belitz	Physician Assistant, Family Med	2934	Antelope	9/18/2026	$ 160,000.00	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 90,000.00			
979	9/30/2026	Mikayla Freese	MD/DO, General Surgery	36560	Hall	8/18/2026	$ 319,599.48	$ 30,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 180,000.00			
1004	9/30/2026	Caleb Schroeder	MD/DO, General Surgery	28337	Kearney, Adams, Fillmore, York	9/1/2015	$ 133,316.43	$ 30,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 133,316.42			
1021	10/6/2026	Grace Bessmer	Nurse Practitioner, Family Med	117198	Madison	9/22/2026	$ 73,962.17	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 73,962.16	7/1/2028	$ 50,000.00	$ 73,962.17
1011	10/21/2026	Hollie Weyeneth	Licensed Mental Health Professional	12/30/2026	Red Willow	2/12/2022	$ 26,748.78	$ 15,000.00	1/1/2027	$ 26,748.78			
1002	10/29/2026	Cassandra Munoz-Parsons	Nurse Practitioner, Psychiatry	112040	Richardson	4/3/2023	$ 37,497.66	$ 6,500.00	1/1/2027	$ 37,497.66	7/1/2028	$ 26,000.00	$ 37,497.66
1022	11/4/2026	Haylee Gustafson	Physician Assistant, General Internal Med	2581	Otoe	4/19/2022	$ 71,650.94	$ 12,500.00	1/1/2027	$ 71,650.91	7/1/2029	$ 50,000.00	$ 71,650.94

SLRP Only
SLRP or STATE
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11. Adjourn

Next meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 12th, 2027 in Lincoln (hybrid). The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

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