



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, February 27, 2025

MEDIA CONTACT:

Governor's Press Office, ra-gvgovpress@pa.gov

**Solving the Rural Health Care Worker Shortage: Governor Shapiro
Visits Bradford County Hospital to Highlight Initiatives to Recruit
More Health Care Providers in Rural Communities**

Treasurer Stacy Garrity, Senator Gene Yaw, and Representative Tina Pickett joined the Governor's visit today and voiced their support for strengthening our rural health care workforce.

Governor Shapiro's budget proposal is a commonsense plan that builds on two years of progress by solving more problems — including the rural health care workforce shortage.

All across the Commonwealth, rural communities are facing challenges in accessing health care — Governor Shapiro's budget proposal makes strategic investments to strengthen the rural health care workforce, expand access to care, and help to keep hospitals open.





Sayre, PA – Today, **Governor Shapiro** and **Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) Secretary Dr. Latika Davis-Jones** visited Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Bradford County to highlight the Governor’s [2025-26 proposed budget](#), which strengthens his commitment to addressing Pennsylvania’s rural health care workforce shortage and supporting rural hospitals.

The Governor’s budget proposal makes targeted investments to expand the health care workforce, ensure rural communities have access to care, and help to keep hospitals open. It includes **\$10 million** to support rural hospitals facing service cuts or closures and **expands loan repayment programs for health care workers**, similar to the successful substance use disorder (SUD) loan repayment program at DDAP. Since taking office, the **Shapiro Administration** has successfully invested more than **\$40 million** in helping nearly 675 professionals working in Pennsylvania’s drug and alcohol field through DDAP’s student loan repayment program.

“Here in Pennsylvania, we are facing shortages of health care professionals – especially in our rural communities.” said **Governor Shapiro**. “My budget takes concrete steps to recruit more health care providers and incentivize them to work in great communities like this one in Bradford County. By strengthening our rural health care workforce pipelines, my Administration is taking action to support the dedicated professionals who care for our communities and ensure no one is left behind.”

“DDAP’s student loan repayment program is making a difference in the lives of the helpers and healers on the frontlines of the overdose and opioid epidemics,” said **Secretary Davis-Jones**. “Governor Shapiro has big plans to take the success of DDAP’s program and replicate it elsewhere. Loan repayment works, and I’m confident it can work across the healthcare sectors — in Bradford County and other rural areas of the Commonwealth.”

"Thank you, Governor Shapiro, Secretary Davis-Jones, and the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs for this opportunity to share my story. As a licensed clinical social worker, and for 12 years now, I've served rural communities in Lycoming and Clinton counties," said **Barbara Vanaskie, who is a SUD loan repayment program awardee**. "This loan repayment program has lifted the burden of student loans, allowing me and others to focus on what matters — helping people. Governor Shapiro is expanding this life-changing model to support more health care professionals across Pennsylvania, ensuring they can stay in their jobs, serve their communities, and strengthen our workforce."

During his visit, **Governor Shapiro** was joined by **Guthrie Clinic President and CEO Dr. Edmund Sabanegh, President of Guthrie Medical Group Dr. Joseph Ronsivalle, Chief Nurse Executive for Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital Deb Raupers, Pennsylvania Treasurer Stacey Garrity, Senator Gene Yaw, Representative Tina Pickett**, and health care professionals and patients who shared firsthand experiences of the challenges facing rural hospitals and their surrounding communities.

"In June 2022, a Harley ride with my wife turned into a life-threatening accident when I hit a deer just a mile from home. I was flown by Guthrie Air to Robert Packer Hospital, where the trauma team, EMS crew, and ICU staff saved my life," said **Kevin Gibbs, a former patient at Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital who now works at the hospital as a security officer**. "Their heroic efforts allowed me to recover, and today, I'm proud to give back as a security officer at Guthrie. We are fortunate to have this level of care in our community, and we need a dedicated workforce across Pennsylvania to save more lives."

Addressing Pennsylvania’s Rural Health Care Workforce Shortage

Across Pennsylvania, rural communities face significant challenges in accessing health care. In rural counties, there is only one primary care physician for every 522 residents, compared to one for every 222 residents in urban areas. Over the past 20 years, more than 30 rural hospitals in Pennsylvania have reduced services or closed entirely. Behavioral health care access is also a growing crisis, with Pennsylvania expected to face a shortage of more than 6,300 mental health professionals by 2026. To combat these challenges, **Governor Shapiro’s 2025-26 budget** proposes:

- **\$5 million to expand the Primary Care Loan Repayment Program** at the **Department of Health**, offering loan repayment for physicians, dentists, and

psychologists who commit to working in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas like rural communities.

- **\$10 million to expand behavioral health loan repayment programs**, ensuring providers are available statewide – including in rural communities – to meet the growing demand for mental health care and address a critical workforce shortage.
- **\$5 million to educate, train, and recruit nursing professionals** through tuition support, ensuring a steady pipeline of highly trained professionals in rural hospitals.
- **Legislation to grant full practice authority to nurse practitioners** who have worked under a physician for three years, increasing access to care in underserved communities.

The Governor's budget also proposes **\$10 million to support struggling rural hospitals** that have been forced to cut services or close their doors. This investment will leverage an additional **\$25.1 million in federal matching funds**, bringing total support to **\$35.1 million**.

Building on a Strong Record of Expanding Access to Rural Health Care

Since taking office, **Governor Shapiro** has prioritized expanding access to health care — particularly in rural communities:

- **Invested \$3 million from opioid settlement funds** Governor Shapiro helped secure when he was Attorney General to integrate behavioral and primary health care services.
- **Launched a \$1.3 million pilot program** to expand maternal health services in rural communities.
- **Signed bipartisan legislation expanding telemedicine**, ensuring Pennsylvanians can access health care providers remotely.
- **Committed \$40 million to support nearly 675 professionals** in the substance use disorder (SUD) workforce through DDAP's loan repayment program, with a focus on rural and underserved areas. The funding for this initiative came from multistate investigations of opioid manufacturers and distributors spearheaded by then Attorney General Shapiro.

Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital, a 288-bed Level 1 Trauma Center, has provided high-quality care in northern Pennsylvania and upstate New York since 1885. The hospital employs more than 3,800 staff and has invested heavily in workforce recruitment,

including incentive programs offering up to \$75,000 in sign-on bonuses for registered nurses to combat staffing shortages.

"Guthrie's commitment to quality, safe patient care and experience drives us to be a national model for rural healthcare," said **Dr. Sabanegh, President and CEO of the Guthrie Clinic**. "Our caregivers are the lifeline of this care, and we are laser-focused on recruiting and retaining top talent through competitive wages and family-friendly benefits. We appreciate Governor Shapiro's leadership in strengthening the rural health care workforce."

"Guthrie thanks Governor Shapiro for including a \$5 million investment in the Nursing Shortage Assistance Program in his proposed budget. This funding will make a huge difference by supporting students from top higher education institutions across Pennsylvania. Through this program, their tuition is covered, and in return, they commit to working at a designated health system like Guthrie for up to three years," said **Chief Nurse Executive for Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital Deb Raupers**. "By strengthening this pipeline, we are enhancing our workforce, fostering the next generation of nurses, and laying the foundation for clinical excellence and leadership at Guthrie."

"Access to quality healthcare is critical to the success of our Commonwealth. Every Pennsylvanian deserves the peace of mind that they can get the care they need close to home," said **Pennsylvania Treasurer Stacey Garrity**. "As a lifelong Bradford County resident and trustee of Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital, I commend Governor Shapiro's commitment to ensuring our families, friends, and neighbors in rural Pennsylvania are not left behind. Supporting rural hospitals and the dedicated healthcare workers who serve these communities is essential to our state's future."

"The Center for Rural Pennsylvania released a population projection showing that by 2050, much of the state's growth will shift southeast—while areas like my district, including Bradford County, are projected to lose population if nothing changes. That's why investing in rural healthcare is critical. Declining populations impact emergency services, healthcare, broadband, and more," said **Senator Gene Yaw**. "I'm tired of rural Pennsylvania being overlooked, and I'll fight to make sure it's supported. I appreciate Governor Shapiro's commitment to strengthening the rural workforce and investing in the healthcare services our communities need."

"Workforce is the foundation that makes everything else work. That's why Governor Shapiro, this proposed budget, and hopefully we in the legislature are committed to creating incentives that help systems like this attract the talented professionals they need," said **Representative Tina Pickett**. "While we're here to celebrate progress, there's always more to do. Expanding broadband and strengthening healthcare in rural areas are essential. We love our rural communities — that's why we must ensure they have the healthcare systems they need to thrive."

Solving Problems by Investing in Workforce Development

Governor Shapiro's commitment to workforce development extends beyond health care. The Governor is also addressing workforce shortages in other critical industries like education and child care — sectors that are vital to the state's economic growth. Under his leadership, Pennsylvania has expanded workforce development and increased funding for vo-tech programs, career and technical education (CTE), and apprenticeships by nearly **\$65 million**. Today, Pennsylvania invests 50 percent more in workforce development than when the Governor took office, equipping workers with the skills needed for high-demand jobs.

The Governor's proposed 2025-26 budget prioritizes training and recruitment efforts to strengthen industries like rural health care, ensuring every Pennsylvanian has access to quality jobs, essential services, and communities have the doctors, nurses, and health care professionals they need now and for generations to come.

Watch **Governor Shapiro's** full budget address to a joint session of the House and Senate [here](#). See the Governor's full remarks as prepared for delivery [here](#).

Read more about [Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget proposal](#). Explore the Governor's 2025-26 Budget in Brief [here](#), or visit shapirobudget.pa.gov to learn more.

#