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Shapiro Administration Officials Visit Blair County to Highlight Proposed Investments to Help Solve Rural Health Care Workforce Shortages

Governor Shapiro's budget proposal makes strategic investments to strengthen the rural health care workforce, expand access to care, and help keep hospitals open.

Tyrone, PA – In an ongoing effort to strengthen the rural health care workforce and support rural hospitals in Pennsylvania, **Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen** and **Secretary of Human Services Dr. Val Arkoosh** visited Penn Highlands Tyrone today to highlight **Governor Josh Shapiro's** proposed investments in Pennsylvania's rural health care workforce as part of the [2025-26 budget](#) to improve access to care.

"The Shapiro Administration is taking a multi-pronged approach to address challenges facing rural hospitals across Pennsylvania," said **Secretary Bogen**, who has visited nearly a dozen rural hospitals throughout the state. "Governor Shapiro's budget proposal offers recruitment and retention incentives that would support additional health care professionals, including behavioral health providers and health professionals to work in rural hospitals and communities."

Pennsylvania is facing shortages of health care professionals, particularly in rural communities, where there is only one primary care physician for every 522 residents. Conversely, in urban areas, there is one primary care physician for every 222 residents. That means rural Pennsylvanians, who already must travel further distances to see their doctors, also have less access to health care.

Governor Shapiro is doubling down on his support for rural health care workers in the 2025-26 budget, proposing **\$10 million** to specifically provide support to rural hospitals that are continuously subjected to changing health care markets and that have been forced to cut or shutter services. This investment will also leverage an additional \$25.1 million in federal matching funds, bringing total support to \$35.1 million. The 2025-26 proposed budget further invests **\$5 million** to expand the Primary Care Loan Repayment Program offering loan repayment for health care providers that serve in rural communities.

Offering incentives to health care workers has proven to be a successful strategy for recruiting and retaining high-quality practitioners. That is exactly what the Department of Health's [Primary Care Loan Repayment Program](#) does, successfully assisting 219 health care professionals — physicians, nurses, dentists, nurse practitioners, and other health care providers throughout the Commonwealth — in the past two fiscal years. Nineteen of those health care professionals are currently caring for residents in the greater Blair County region.

“A strong, accessible, affordable health care system is the foundation of any community. Without a strong health care presence, we cannot attract new investments, foster economic development, and keep or attract residents to our communities,” said **Secretary Arkoosh**. “Without the critical health care services like those at Penn Highlands, too many rural Pennsylvanians will have to travel far from home to get the care they need. Simply put: when we invest in rural health care in Pennsylvania, everyone benefits.”

Recently, [Governor Josh Shapiro visited Temple University Health System](#) to highlight his plans to invest \$5 million to educate, train, and recruit nursing professionals. The [Governor also visited Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital](#) in Sayre, Bradford County, to highlight his commitment to addressing Pennsylvania's rural health care workforce shortage and support for rural hospitals.

“Penn Highlands Healthcare hospitals, which are located in rural communities, are the life blood of those local communities and local economies, because in many cases we are the largest employers. We play a significant role in attracting businesses and industry to spur economic development and without hospitals, many small towns would not exist. Having a hospital nearby is a sign of community vitality,” said **Penn Highlands Healthcare System Chief Medical Officer Dr. Trina Abila**.

To combat these challenges, **Governor Shapiro** launched a rural health care working group in 2023 comprised of stakeholders from the state government, private sector, health care, and others. In addition to the investments above, his [2025-26 budget proposal](#) takes action to support rural hospitals, building a more competitive health care workforce through the following investments:

- **\$10 million** to invest in hospitals statewide, through the Department of Human Services, to assist the Commonwealth in responding to urgent consumer health needs and staffing requirements. This investment will also leverage an additional \$25.1 million in federal matching funds, bringing total support to \$35.1 million.
- **\$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.
- **\$20 million** to provide patient safety and support to hospitals in a new dedicated appropriation, to address barriers to care like affordability, transportation and reliable providers.

- **Enhancing postpartum depression screening** and intervention efforts to ensure timely and equitable access to maternal and mental health care for mothers.
- **Encouraging 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.

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.

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