

**WEST VIRGINIA  
STATE OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023**



## **West Virginia State Office of Rural Health**

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), Bureau for Public Health (BPH), Office of Community Health Systems and Health Promotion (OCHSHP), State Office of Rural Health (SORH) was established in 1990 by Executive Order 8-90. Funds to support this program are provided by federal grants and required state shares/matching funds.

### **Mission**

To implement programs and promote best practice models through collaboration with stakeholders to address rural health care.

### **Vision**

To provide West Virginians with equitable access to health care services and improved outcomes.

### **Motto**

Partnerships, Service, and Quality

### **2023 State Office of Rural Health - Highlights**

- Secured an increase in federal loan repayment funds from \$135,000 to \$692,060.
- SORH Associate Director/Hospital Programs Manager (Lisa Lewis) was recognized for making West Virginia one of the top 10 states to receive an outstanding performance award for its Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP) for the second consecutive year.
- West Virginia's Workforce Programs Manager (Brandon Carman) was elected to the 3RNET Board of Directors and awarded the national Kennedy-Kafer Service award; a first for the State.
- SORH Director (Stephanie Moore) along with two collaborative partners jointly presented at the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) Annual Meeting to share the State's success in collaboration and partner development.
- Released the first edition of "Country Roads" magazine to highlight rural champions across the state.
- Collaborated to conduct the first Community Connection Conference aimed at improving health equity in rural communities.
- SORH Director received the 2023 Excellence in Rural Health – Individual Award.

## Executive Order Expectations

The mission, vision, and motto of SORH are to address the needs of rural health in West Virginia as outlined by Executive Order.

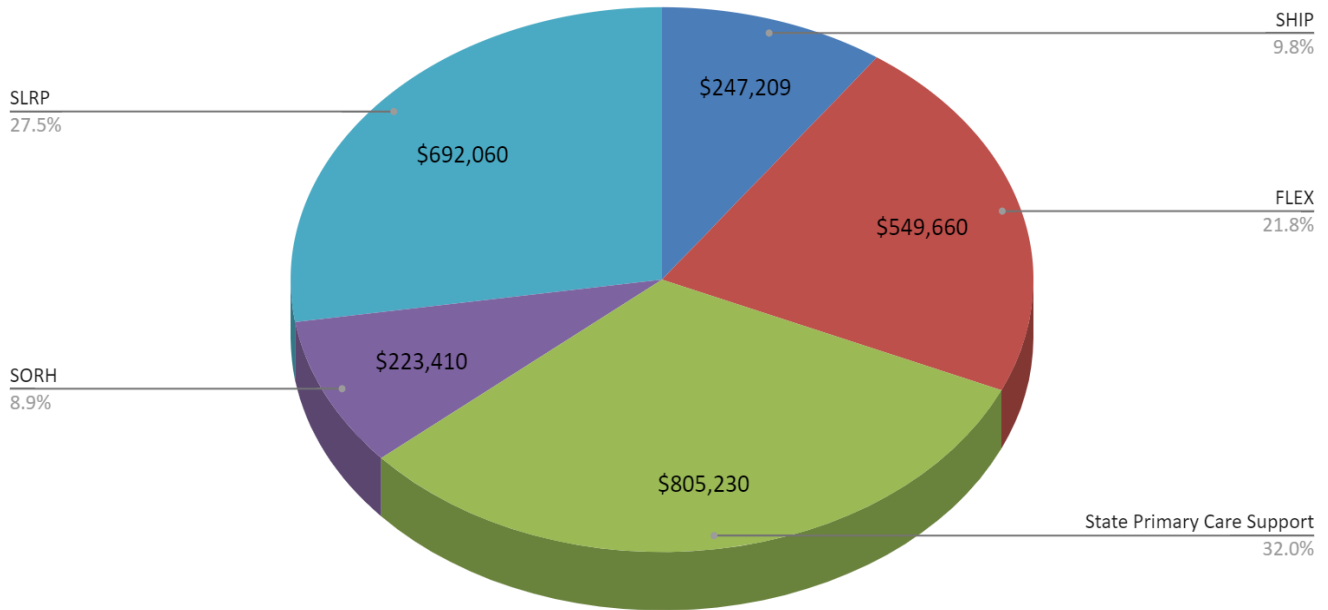
### 1. Design a Strategic Plan for Rural Health Needs

- The five-year State Rural Health Plan was released in January 2018 and is located at <https://dhhr.wv.gov/ruralhealth/publicationsandresources/Pages/default.aspx>.
- The plan focuses on key health problems, identifies objectives, and offers actions to address those problems.
- The plan focuses on the following key health conditions and health indicators:
  - **Behavioral Health**, including substance abuse, addiction, and acute/chronic mental health disorders.
  - **Cardiovascular Disease**, including heart attack, angina, and coronary artery disease.
  - **Lung Disease**, including chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD), black lung, progressive massive fibrosis, and other smoking/occupational exposures.
  - **Obesity**, including physical inactivity, nutrition, and diabetes.
  - **Social Determinants of Health**, including social environment, physical environment, health services, and structural and societal factors.

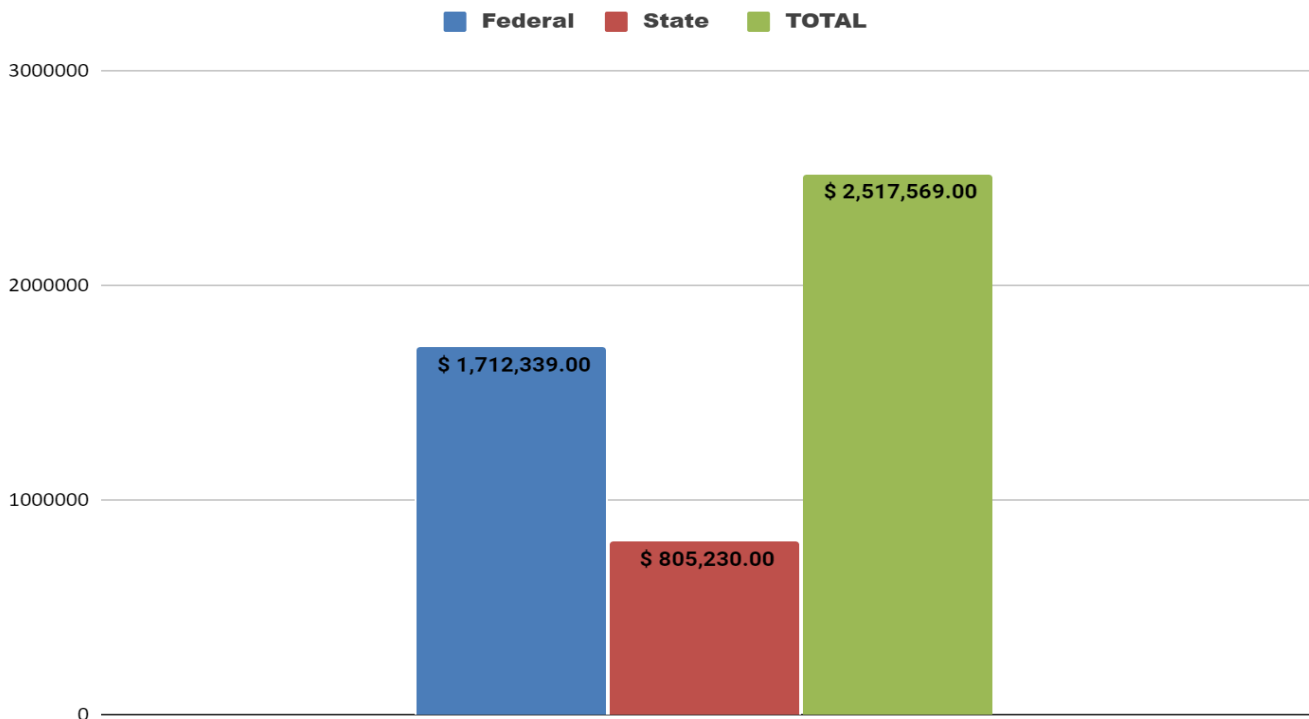
### 2. Manage Federal Rural Health Funds

- The SORH continues to apply for all available funding and has maintained each of the four federal grants indicated below for more than 20 years.
- Staff continuously research grant opportunities for sustainability of the SORH and in support of rural communities.
- During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, an estimated 224,776 health care office visits and pharmacy services were delivered by West Virginia practitioners supported through the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) and the Recruitment and Retention Community Project (RRCP). The majority of these encounters were with patients who reside in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA).

## 2023 SORH Funding Allocations from Federal Grants and State Budget



## 2023 SORH Federal and State Funding Allocations



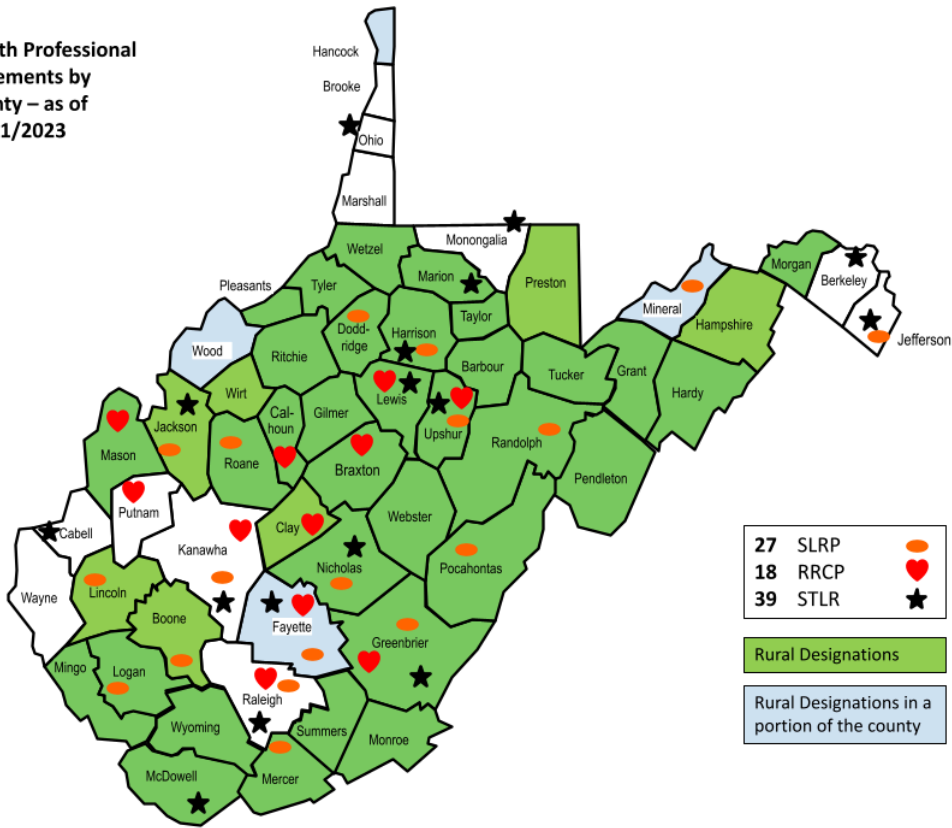
### 3. Address Declines in the Health Care Delivery System

- The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program, or **Flex Program**, was established by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.
  - Nearly half a million dollars of federal funding provides for the creation of rural health networks, promotes regionalization of rural health services, and improves access to hospitals and other services for rural residents.
  - There are currently 21 critical access hospitals (CAH) in West Virginia that benefit from this funding.
  
- The **Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP)** is administered through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources Services Administration, Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.
  - In order to qualify for SHIP funding, the hospital must be located in the U.S., have no more than 49 beds, and be a non-federal hospital. For-profit and not-for-profit tribal hospitals and CAHs are also eligible.
  - There are currently 22 small rural hospitals in West Virginia that benefit from this funding.
  - Eligible hospitals can apply for funding to assist in implementing activities related to:
    - ❖ Value-based purchasing programs;
    - ❖ Accountable care organizations; and
    - ❖ Payment bundling.
  
- Development of a statewide network of **Rural Health Clinics (RHC)**
  - Continued efforts to ensure facility engagement and participation in large and small group sessions. Areas of focus for this group of providers include opportunities for networking/peer-to-peer communications, quality measurement support, and the provision of technical assistance to RHCs based on key financial and operational data.
  - Five RHCs were recognized as top performers in the nation, up from three in 2022.

### 4. Address Issues in Physician Recruitment and Access to Care

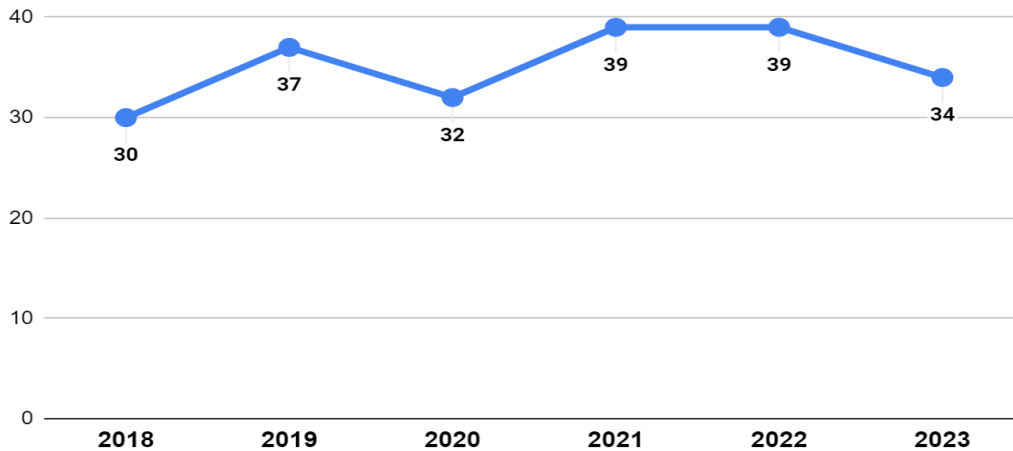
- More than 700 health care professionals have been placed in rural areas of West Virginia in the last 10 years.
  
- The loan repayment programs supported 84 health care professionals this year.
  - Twenty-seven were supported by the **SLRP**.
  - Eighteen were supported by the **RRCP**.
  - Thirty-nine were supported by the **Statewide Therapist Loan Repayment (STLR)** in collaboration with DHHR's Bureau for Behavioral Health (BBH).

**Health Professional  
Placements by  
County – as of  
12/31/2023**

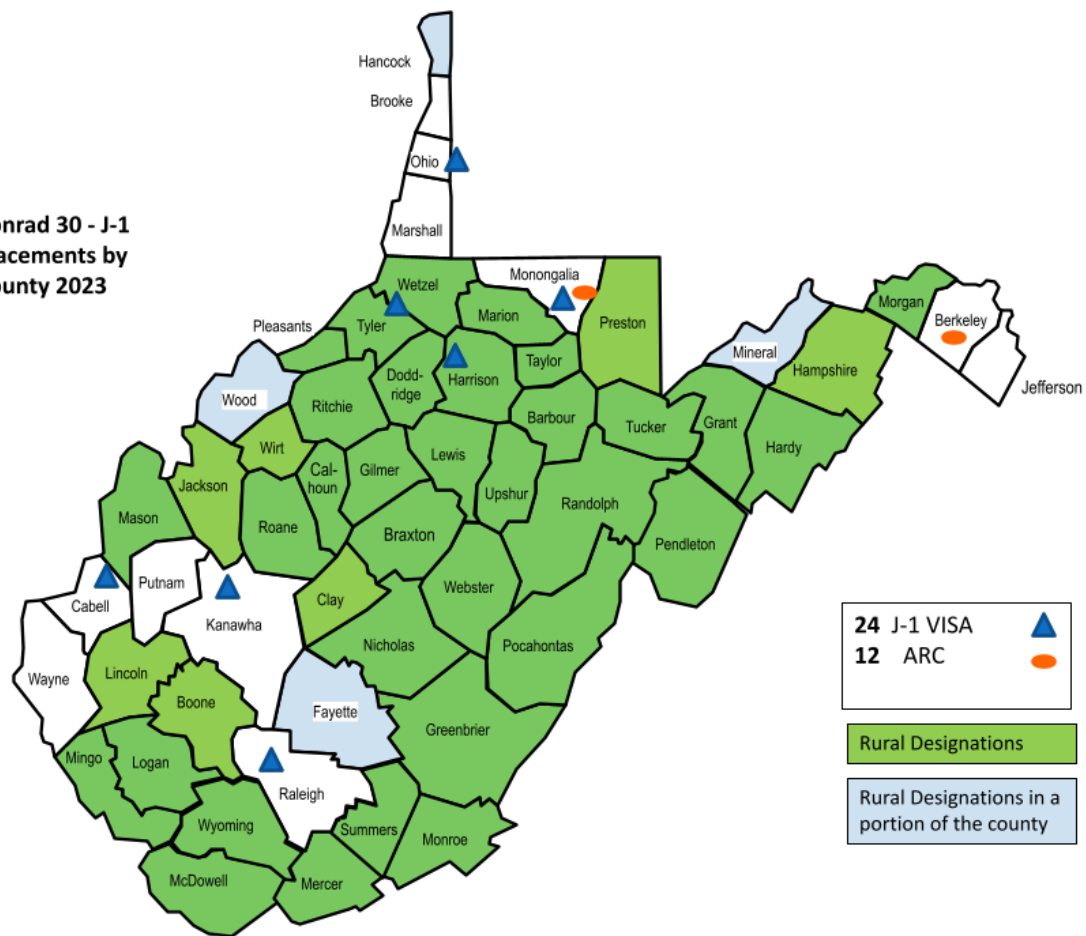


- The **J-1 Visa/Conrad 30 Program** places physicians in locations across the state. In 2023, 29 slots were awarded with 24 slots being filled. Two hospitals were not able to recruit the needed physician. There were 39 requests received with nine awarded through the Appalachian Regional Commission. The number of requests continues to increase yearly.

**Conrad 30 J-1 VISA Applications Received from 2018 through 2023**



**Conrad 30 - J-1  
Placements by  
County 2023**



**5. Coordinate with Health Care Groups and Agencies to Expand Partnerships**

The SORH works to engage partners to enhance coordination efforts and explore opportunities. These efforts will continue, assuming the continuation of federal and state funds for rural health interventions.

WV Hospital Association	West Virginia Health Education Foundation
WV Rural Health Association	Center for Rural Health Development
DHHR’s Office of Drug Control Policy	Partners for Health
Marshall University Office of Minority Health	WVU Institute for Community and Rural Health
Benedum Foundation	DHHR’s Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease
Higher Education Policy Commission	DHHR’s Bureau for Behavioral Health
Division of Primary Care	WV Oral Health Coalition
WV Osteopathic School of Medicine	WV University Prevention Research Center
WV Public Health Association	WV Academy of Family Physicians
WVU Prevention Research Center	DHHR’s Division of Tobacco Prevention
Quality Insights	Collective Impact, LLC
Perinatal Partnership	DHHR’s WV Birth to Three

## **SORH COLLABORATIONS**

- Balance WV Nursing Relocation Project
  - With the Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC)
- Hospital Smart Recruitment Project
  - With HEPC
- Rural Health Clinic Network Development
  - With WV Hospital Association and Health Education Foundation
- WV Academic Mentorship Program: Hepatitis and HIV
  - WVU School of Medicine, WV RHA and BPH
- National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities Grant
  - With the OCHSHP
- Statewide Therapist Loan Repayment Program
  - With the BBH
- WV Health Equity Action Team
  - With the Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease (HPCD)
- Collaborative for Rural Health
  - With the Center for Rural Health Development (CRHD) and the WV RHA
- National Rural Health Day social media “Rural Health Leaders” recognition
  - With the CRHD and the WV RHA
- Community Connections Conference
  - With the OCHSHP and HPCD

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

- Hospital closures
- Community capacity and leadership development needs
- Increase in retiring health care professionals
- Elder isolation in rural areas
- Health care equity for rural populations, or inequity
- Social determinants of health
- Aging parents as caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren
- Aging safely: assisting people in making conscious decisions that allow them to remain independent in their home
- Telehealth and broadband limitations
- Substance use disorder epidemic
- Care delivery and payment shifts



## **CONTACTS**

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