



ALASKA

RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION



Recap: RHTP Impacts: Healthy Communities Kickoff Session, March 23, 2026

Overview

The Alaska Department of Health (DOH), led by Commissioner Heidi Hedberg, launched the first RHTP Impact Series webinar focused on Healthy Communities. This session marked the beginning of a six-part series designed to support collaboration, innovation, and system transformation across Alaska's rural health landscape.

The session emphasized interactive participation, with over 300 attendees contributing ideas, priorities, and potential partnerships.

Purpose of the Impact Series

- Create a collaborative “community of practice” across Alaska
- Facilitate idea exchange and partnership-building
- Align projects with state priorities and CMS-approved funding goals
- Encourage innovative, system-level transformation (not just incremental improvements)

Important distinction: These sessions are not for technical assistance or funding approval, but for connection, strategy, and idea development.

RHTP Context

- One-time federal investment over 5 years
- ~\$272 million allocated in Year 1
- Designed as an iterative funding model:
 - Projects can evolve year-to-year
 - Emphasis on learning, adapting, and scaling impact

Six Focus Areas of the Impact Series

1. Healthy Communities (*this session*)
2. Healthcare Access
3. Healthy Beginnings
4. Paying for Value
5. Strengthening Workforce
6. Technology & Innovation

Healthy Communities: Core Focus

Address root causes of poor health in rural Alaska through:

- Preventative and primary care access
- Chronic disease prevention and management
- Behavioral health and substance use
- Community-based workforce development
- Digital health tools and data infrastructure
- Culturally relevant health education and lifestyle support

Key Challenges Identified

- High chronic disease burden
- Behavioral health challenges (including high suicide rates)
- Social isolation in rural areas
- Limited infrastructure (water, sanitation, housing)
- Workforce shortages
- Fragmented systems (healthcare, schools, community services)

Participant Priority Areas (Poll Results)

Top priorities identified by attendees:

1. Behavioral health & substance use
2. Chronic disease & self-management
3. Cultural/traditional wellness
4. Youth engagement

5. Nutrition and physical activity

Key Themes from Discussion & “Blue Sky” Exercise

Participants were asked: *What would it look like if Alaskans could receive care without leaving their communities?*

Emerging Ideas

1. In-home and community-based care

- Home dialysis
- Aging in place models
- Expanded personal care and hospice services

2. Workforce innovation

- Grow local workforce (residencies, training programs)
- Community health workers and paramedics as care extenders
- Rotational workforce models (e.g., 30 days on/off)

3. Access & care coordination

- Faster referrals and telehealth integration
- Reduced unnecessary ER visits
- Better pre-visit coordination for specialists

4. Preventative care at scale

- Statewide screening (e.g., cardiovascular disease)
- Integrated chronic disease prevention systems

5. Technology integration

- Remote monitoring
- AI-supported care tools
- Digital health platforms

6. Housing & infrastructure

- Temporary housing for rural patients traveling for care
- Community-centered care hubs

Case Study Exercise: “Alex” (Age 15)

A rural teen with asthma and early obesity highlighted system gaps:

- Limited physical activity options
- Lack of coordinated care
- Minimal integration between school, healthcare, and community

Solutions Identified

- School-based health and wellness programs
- Telehealth and remote monitoring
- Community health workers and peer support
- Family and caregiver education
- Culturally relevant nutrition and activity programs
- Longitudinal care models (support across life transitions)

Critical Partnerships Identified

- Schools (community hubs)
- Tribal organizations
- Local governments
- Healthcare providers
- Community-based organizations
- Technology partners
- Caregivers and families

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration is essential—no single organization can solve these challenges alone
- There is strong alignment across ideas, especially around:
 - In-home care

- Workforce development
- Preventative care systems
- This funding is a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity to:
 - Reimagine systems
 - Build scalable, transformative models
- Projects must align with state priorities, not just local needs
- Focus should be on long-term transformation, not short-term fixes

What’s Next

Monthly sessions will continue for each focus area. Future sessions will:

- Dive deeper into priority topics
- Feature more targeted discussions
- Potentially include **breakout groups**

DOH will:

- Analyze chat feedback and poll data
- Use input to shape upcoming sessions

Action Items for Participants

- Connect with others from the session (especially aligned interests)
- Refine project ideas to align with:
 - Healthy Communities framework
 - RHTP funding goals
- Attend additional Impact Series sessions
- Monitor the DOH website for updates and resources

RHTP represents a long-term opportunity to strengthen healthcare access, sustainability, workforce capacity, and system performance across rural, remote, and frontier Alaska.

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More information and updates can be found at: alaska.health.gov/RHTP