



## Alaska Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) Webinar Recap – Program Overview & Letter of Interest

### Overview of the Webinar

This webinar introduced Alaska's approach to implementing the **Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP)**, a federally funded initiative designed to improve health outcomes and strengthen care delivery across rural, remote, and frontier communities.

Speakers from the Alaska Department of Health and the Alaska Community Foundation, who will be the subrecipient administrator, emphasized that RHTP represents a **rare opportunity to drive long-term, system-level change**, rather than short-term or incremental improvements. The session focused on the first step in the process—**registration and submission of a Letter of Interest (LOI)**—and outlined how organizations can begin engaging with the program.

### Program Vision and Intent

**RHTP is not business as usual.** The program is intended to help Alaska rethink how health care is delivered by:

- Improving health outcomes statewide
- Expanding access to care
- Building systems that are financially and operationally sustainable over time

Department of Health leadership emphasized that RHTP funds are **not meant to fill long-standing funding gaps** or replace existing resources. Instead, they are intended for **strategic investments** that can continue to deliver value after the five-year funding period ends.

### Core Goals of the Rural Health Transformation Program

Speakers aligned their remarks around three foundational goals that guide all RHTP investments:

#### ***Goal 1: Promote Lifelong Health and Wellbeing***

Projects should support healthier beginnings, stronger communities, and improved access to care for Alaskans across the lifespan—particularly those living in rural and remote areas.

#### ***Goal 2: Build Sustainable, Outcomes-Driven Health Systems***

Investments should strengthen care delivery models so they are more affordable, efficient, and capable of producing better outcomes over time.

### ***Goal 3: Drive Workforce and Technology Innovation***

The program recognizes that workforce stability, modern technology, and effective tools are essential to achieving the first two goals. Projects should consider how people and technology work together to improve care.

All speakers stressed that proposed projects must clearly align with one or more of these goals and with the proposed funding uses outlined in Alaska's CMS application.

### **Funding Structure and Federal Expectations**

RHTP is a **five-year federal cooperative agreement** with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), but funding is awarded **one year at a time**.

Key points highlighted during the webinar:

- Each year functions as a separate federal budget period
- Year One has a shorter timeline, requiring careful planning and readiness
- Funds awarded in Year One must be fully spent by **October 2027**
- CMS will redistribute unspent funds beginning in 2028

Because future funding depends on demonstrated progress, speakers emphasized the importance of realistic project scopes, strong execution, and timely reporting.

### **Role of the Alaska Community Foundation**

The Alaska Community Foundation (ACF) serves as the grant administrator for RHTP.

In this role, ACF:

- Manages the application and review process
- Distributes grant funds
- Provides technical and administrative support to applicants
- Ensures the process is fair, transparent, and accessible statewide

Applicants will apply for funding through ACF, rather than directly through the State of Alaska. Speakers highlighted ACF's experience managing complex funding programs and supporting organizations at varying levels of readiness.

### **Application Pathways and Project Readiness**

Created with input from hundreds of statewide partners, Alaska's RHTP is intentionally structured to support projects at different stages of development.

Speakers described four primary pathways:

- **Readiness grants** for early-stage concepts and capacity building
- **Planning grants** for more defined ideas that need further design
- **Implementation grants** for projects ready to launch
- **Targeted innovation grants** for state-prioritized initiatives

A key takeaway was that not every strong idea needs to be implementation-ready in Year One. Organizations are encouraged to be honest about their readiness and capacity and to use planning and readiness funding when appropriate.

## **Step One: Registration and Letter of Interest (LOI)**

The webinar emphasized that everyone begins at the same place: registration and submission of a Letter of Interest.

Key details shared:

- The LOI window opens February 17 and closes March 11
- The LOI is high-level and designed to assess fit—not to rank projects
- It helps route ideas to the most appropriate funding pathway

The LOI asks applicants to describe:

- Their organization and service area
- The problem or opportunity they aim to address
- Their proposed approach
- Expected benefits to rural, remote, or frontier communities
- Alignment with RHTP goals
- Project readiness and anticipated timeline
- Partners and estimated budget range

Speakers clarified that no document uploads or detailed budgets are required at this stage.

## **Eligibility, Partnerships, and Capacity**

Speakers addressed common questions about eligibility and partnerships:

- Organizations based in urban areas are eligible if their work serves rural or remote communities
- Prior experience managing federal grants is not required
- Organizations must be registered with [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)

When projects involve multiple partners, one lead organization should submit the LOI, with partners clearly identified. Speakers cautioned that organizations proposing multiple projects should carefully consider their capacity to deliver on those commitments, particularly in the first year.

## **Support, Office Hours, and Next Steps**

To support applicants, the Department of Health and ACF will provide:

- Office hours over the coming weeks
- Additional webinars that dive deeper into program goals and funding pathways
- FAQs and ongoing updates on the Department of Health website

## Key Takeaways for the Public

- RHTP is a historic investment in Alaska's health system
- The program is focused on long-term, sustainable transformation
- Projects of all sizes and stages are encouraged to apply
- Strong alignment with program goals and realistic readiness are critical
- Collaboration across communities, sectors, and regions is essential to success

## Media Highlights: Selected Quotes

The following quotes are pulled directly from webinar remarks and lightly edited for clarity. They are provided for media use and accurately reflect the speakers' intent and statements.

Heidi Hedberg, Commissioner Alaska Department of Health:

- "Remember, year one is really short. Right? There's a short runway, so it necessitates that we need to prioritize project implementation, but we want to care for those agencies that need that readiness support or that planning support."
- "We're looking at the entire state and every community, big and small, and we're going to care for those communities to make sure that it's equitable across the state."

Emily Ricci, Deputy Commissioner Alaska Department of Health:

- "Every project needs to tie back to the goals of the Rural Health Transformation Program, better outcomes, sustainable systems, and improved access for Alaskans."
- "This funding isn't about filling old gaps; it's about transforming how care is delivered in Alaska."

Betsy Wood, Associate Director, Alaska Department of Health:

- "This is one-time funding, and CMS expects strategic investments that can be sustained after the grant period ends."
- "Readiness and the capacity to execute, especially in year one, are critical."

Alex MacKay, President & CEO, Alaska Community Foundation:

- "Not every strong project starts at implementation, and that's intentional."
- "We want a strong, balanced portfolio that reflects Alaska's diversity, geography, and real-world needs."

Megan Castelia, Vice President of Programs & Grants, Alaska Community Foundation:

- "The Letter of Interest is really about fit, not ranking. It helps us understand where your idea is and route it to the right pathway so it can get the support it needs."
- "You don't need a fully built proposal at this stage. We're looking for clear concepts, alignment with the program goals, and an honest sense of readiness."