



# ALASKA

## RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION



Recap: RHTP Impacts: Healthy Beginnings, March 24, 2026

### Overview

The Alaska Department of Health (DOH) hosted its third RHTP Impact Series session focused on Healthy Beginnings, centering on maternal, infant, and pediatric health across Alaska's rural communities.

Facilitated by Dr. Ann Zink and Dr. Lisa Rabinowitz, the session emphasized collaboration, innovation, and system redesign to improve outcomes for families, particularly in geographically isolated regions.

### Purpose of the Session

- Build a statewide community of practice
- Foster cross-sector partnerships
- Encourage innovative, “blue sky” thinking
- Align projects with state priorities and CMS funding goals

**Reminder:** These sessions are for connection and idea development, not technical assistance or project approval.

### RHTP Context

- 5-year federal program to transform rural healthcare
- Alaska received one of the largest awards nationally
  - ~\$272 million in Year 1
- Designed as an iterative model:
  - Projects evolve over time
  - Strong emphasis on regional collaboration and long-term system change

## Healthy Beginnings: Core Focus

Strengthening maternal and child health systems to support healthy families from pregnancy through early childhood and beyond.

### Key Challenges Identified

- Long-distance travel for delivery (often requiring relocation weeks early)
- Provider shortages in rural communities
- Limited prenatal and postpartum continuity of care
- Behavioral health gaps (maternal anxiety, isolation, postpartum support)
- Fragmented care coordination across systems
- Social and financial strain on families during maternal transport

## Participant Priority Areas (Poll Results)

Top-ranked priorities:

1. Maternal, prenatal, and newborn health
2. Behavioral and school-based health
3. Vaccination, oral health, and ACEs prevention
4. Integrated, complex care coordination

Key insight:

Participants emphasized that these areas are deeply interconnected and should be addressed as a continuum of care, not siloed initiatives.

## Key Themes from Discussion & Case Study (“Lena”)

A rural, first-time mother required to leave her community for delivery highlighted systemic gaps.

### Maternal Transport & Family Impact

- Significant emotional, cultural, and financial strain
- Separation from support systems
- Need for family-centered care models, not just patient-centered

Emerging solutions:

- Expanded Medicaid support (e.g., travel escorts)
- Peer and support groups for relocated mothers
- Research to better understand full family impacts

## **Keeping Care Closer to Home**

- Focus on preventing high-risk pregnancies through:
  - Hypertension and diabetes management
  - Earlier intervention and monitoring

Goal: Enable more mothers to safely deliver in or near their communities

## **Home Visiting & Community-Based Support**

- Strong emphasis on maternal and infant home visiting programs
- Role of community health workers and navigators

Best practices identified:

- “Warm handoffs” between community-based support and providers
- Continuity of care before, during, and after delivery
- Building trust and relationships with families

## **Data & Lived Experience**

Data is critical, but not sufficient alone

Key insights:

- Combine:
  - Claims and clinical data
  - Community insights and lived experience

Shift in approach:

- Treat data as a learning system, not just reporting
- Use insights to drive continuous improvement

## Care Coordination & Navigation

- Fragmentation across systems remains a major barrier

Promising models:

- Resource navigation systems (e.g., centralized referral platforms)
- Integrated support across:
  - Medical
  - Behavioral health
  - Social services

## Workforce & Training

- Need to expand and upskill rural workforce

Ideas included:

- OB simulation training for rural providers
- Expanding roles for:
  - Community health aides
  - Midwives and doulas
- Strengthening local capacity for maternal care

## Schools as Community Hubs

- Schools identified as a powerful entry point for family engagement

Opportunity:

- Health education through students reaches entire families
- Integration of health services within school systems

## Technology & Remote Monitoring

- Strong interest in:
  - Telehealth
  - Remote prenatal monitoring (e.g., blood pressure)

Goals:

- Reduce complications
- Increase access without requiring travel

## **Whole-Person, Whole-Family Approach**

- Shift from siloed care to integrated lifecycle model

Key concept:

- Support the mother–baby dyad as one unit
- Extend care across:
  - Prenatal → postpartum → childhood → adolescence

## **Vision: A Transformed System**

Participants outlined a future where:

- Prenatal care is consistent and locally accessible
- Travel for delivery is reduced and better coordinated
- Postpartum care includes ongoing home and community support
- Care teams include clinical and non-clinical roles
- Systems are designed around families, not institutions

## **Critical Partnerships Identified**

- Tribal health organizations
- Schools and education systems
- Community-based organizations
- Healthcare providers and hospitals
- State agencies
- National research partners (e.g., NIH)
- Families and caregivers

## **Key Takeaways**

- Healthy beginnings lead to long-term population health impacts

- Maternal and child health must be addressed as a continuous, integrated system
- Family-centered design is essential, not just patient-centered
- Data must be paired with real-world experience and community voice
- There is strong alignment around:
  - Home visiting
  - Care coordination
  - Workforce expansion
  - Technology-enabled care

## What's Next

- Future sessions will:
  - Dive deeper into priority areas
  - Include more targeted discussions and breakout groups
- DOH will use the information provided to shape upcoming sessions, including:
  - Poll results
  - Chat insights
  - Participant feedback

## Action Items for Participants

- Build partnerships across sectors and regions
- Develop ideas that:
  - Keep care closer to home
  - Support families holistically
  - Align with RHTP goals
- Leverage existing data and community insights
- Participate in upcoming sessions and regional meetings
- Explore DOH resources and technical assistance opportunities

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](https://alaska.health.gov/RHTP)