Federal Office of Rural Health Policy Updates

September 7, 2017

What’s New

Federal Resources for Disaster Response. In response to Hurricane Harvey and preparation for Irma, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have made online resources available for ongoing needs in communities. The HHS Hurricane Harvey Webpage contains the latest updates, resources for health professionals, distress helplines and resources for mental health recovery and safety tips and alerts. FEMA’s Hurricane Harvey Webpage links to Emergency Management Offices in Texas and Louisiana, goods and services available through the FEMA Industry Liaison Program and guidelines for ways to help at the community level. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a range of programs for rural community recovery, food and shelter assistance, and loss of crop and livestock among other issues particular to rural areas on their web pages. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the federal agency that houses FORHP, has seen deployment of more than 40 of its officers from the U.S. Public Health Service to Texas and Louisiana and expects the effort will be ongoing for several months.

NQF: Assessing Telehealth and Ways to Measure Quality. The National Quality Forum (NQF) issued two reports on Tuesday identifying ways to measure the impact and value of telehealth services and to assess the current state of interoperability. “Telehealth is a vital resource, especially for people in rural areas seeking help from specialists, such as mental health providers,” said Marcia Ward, PhD, director of the Rural Telehealth Research Center at the University of Iowa, and co-chair of NQF’s Telehealth Committee. “Telehealth is healthcare. It is critically important that we measure the quality of telehealth and identify areas for improvement just as we do for in-person care.” For the first report, Creating a Framework to Support Measure Development for Telehealth, the committee identified six high priority areas for measuring telehealth quality, including travel time saved, patient empowerment, and value added to evidence-based practices. This report was produced by NQF under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and was sponsored by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy. The second, Interoperability 2016-2017, examines the ability of health systems and IT domains to access, use and exchange information electronically and provides a set of guiding principles for measuring quality as interoperability progresses.

Funding Opportunities

Researching Health Behavior for Young People – January 7, 2018. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) seeks innovative research identifying mechanisms of influence for promoting positive and sustainable health behaviors in young people from birth to age 21. Applications from state, county or city governments, institutions of higher education, and Native American tribal governments among other eligible organizations should target social and cultural factors and appropriate stages of influence for learning
lifelong health behaviors. NIH strongly encourages applications from multidisciplinary teams that can address the many factors involved in health behaviors. Rural providers and stakeholders can use the AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit to better understand how culture and beliefs affect health decisions.

Policy Updates

Questions about Rural Health Policy Updates? Write to ruralpolicy@hrsa.gov

Comments Requested: Verifying CAHs Meet Medicare Requirements – September 29. CMS specifies the information Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) must submit to document compliance with the requirements to participate in Medicare (see 42 FCR 485 subpart F) and ensure patient safety and well-being. CMS believes submitting this information to be “standard medical practice” and estimates 1,215 CAHs will together spend more than 24,000 hours each year to comply. Commenters can provide feedback on the reality of the estimated burden as well as ways to improve the utility or clarity of the information collected, including by way of automated collection. CAH personnel can find resources to help prepare for surveys of Medicare requirements, including a directory of state survey agencies and tools for quality improvement.

Updates to the Marketplace Navigator Program. CMS has announced they will spend $10 million on Marketplace enrollment education activities for the Navigator program this year, and they will target educational outreach on specific demographic and geographic groups. In addition, navigator grant awards will be based on achieved Marketplace enrollment in the previous year, e.g. grantees enrolling 70 percent of their enrollment goal last year will receive 70 percent of their previous grant amount. Of note for rural providers and stakeholders, CMS is asking navigators to focus assistance on to consumers who are currently enrolled in areas where issuers have reduced or eliminated 2018 plan offerings, as well as to new enrollees.

Resources, Learning Events and Technical Assistance

Overview of MIPS for Small, Rural, and Underserved Practices – Friday, September 8, 1:00 - 2:30 pm ET. CMS and the National Rural Health Association will host a webinar on the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) track of the Quality Payment Program. Topics that will be covered include: overview of the Quality Payment Program, overview of MIPS, flexibilities and resources for small practices, overview of Virtual Groups, and resources offered by technical assistance organizations. Rural providers including Critical Access Hospital clinicians interested in learning more about the participation requirements of MIPS and options for voluntary reporting, particularly for Rural Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers, should plan to participate.

Opioid Epidemic – Virtual Town Hall – Friday, September 8 at 3:00 pm ET. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials will host a Virtual Town Hall in association with the Harvard School of Public Health. Learn from peer health officials
addressing the epidemic in their states. Presenters will offer their perspectives and share innovative approaches to preventing opioid misuse and abuse, from education prevention to treatment and recovery.

**3RNet’s Annual Conference – September 12-14.** The National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network (3RNet) will hold its annual conference in Scottsdale, AZ. 3RNet members represent over 5,000 communities across the U.S. that actively recruit physicians and other health care providers to work in rural areas. Attendees will benefit from workshops and a speaker line up sharing insight on rural recruitment challenges, resources and tools.

**Telehealth 101 – Tuesday, September 12 at 1:00 pm ET.** During this hour-long webinar, the South Central Telehealth Resource center will present the easy basics of telehealth and telemedicine which can be used to overcome geographic and cultural distance in rural areas.

**CMS Webinar: 2018 Hospital Inpatient Payment Rule – Tuesday, September 12 at 3:00 pm ET.** CMS will host a webinar on the fiscal year (FY) 2018 Inpatient Prospective Payment system (IPPS) final rule for hospitals and Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) participating in the Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (IQR) program and Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Program. Webinar presenters will identify important changes to both quality reporting programs, including the revised reporting requirements for electronic clinical quality measures (eCQMs). CAHs are not required to participate in IQR but 96% voluntarily submit measures through the Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program. Adopting EHR technology has been more difficult for rural hospitals but there are several resources to help overcome specific rural barriers. Changes in the FY 2018 IPPS final rule take effect October 1.

**Behavioral Health Workforce Conference – Wednesday, September 13, 11:00 am-5:00 pm.** The Health Resources and Services Administration’s Bureau of Health Workforce will host this free virtual conference that will interest practitioners, students or trainees interested in behavioral health workforce education and training. One of the four tracks at the conference (Track 1) will cover training models to reach rural and medically underserved populations.

**Rural Hospitals for Organ Donation – Wednesday, September 13 at 2:00 pm ET.** The Division of Transplantation at HRSA will host this hour-long webinar kick-off of their Hospital Campaign for Organ Donation. More than 1,000 hospitals, including 265 small/rural hospitals, participated in last year’s campaign and earned recognition from the Federal government for their efforts to educate staff, patients, visitors, and community members about organ, eye, and tissue donation. The new campaign starts Oct. 1. To get information on how to dial in to the webinar, send an email to Genna@akoyaonline.com.

**Culturally Appropriate Behavioral Health – Wednesday, September 13 at 3:00 pm ET.** This 90-minute webinar from the SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health
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Solutions address a range of concerns for cultural and linguistic competency and review specific tools and resources behavioral health care that is culturally appropriate. According to the Housing Assistance Council, the 2010 Census reported Hispanics as the largest minority group in rural areas at 9.3% of the rural population, surpassing African Americans at 8.2%. Native Americans were at less than 2%, but more than half of all Native Americans live in rural or small town areas.

Training Series for Health Care Providers on Prescribing Opioids – Ongoing. The CDC has an eight-part online training series to help health care providers apply CDC’s prescribing recommendations in their clinical settings through interactive patient scenarios, videos, knowledge checks, tips, and resources. Rural practitioners report their concern about the potential for opioid abuse, but at the same time report insufficient training in prescribing opioids. For this reason, the CDC created the 2016 Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain and associated training. Topics in the series include communicating with patients, treating chronic pain without opioids, and prescribing decision making.

Resource of the Week

Telehealth Resource Centers Help Rural Providers Connect. This article from the RHIIHub’s Rural Monitor gives a closer look at how the Southwest Telehealth Resource Centers helps health care providers in a large geographical area, with difficult terrain and a diverse population, find the resources they need to implement telehealth solutions. Clinics, hospitals, and public health offices can receive free technical assistance for telehealth solutions that connect medical staff and patients to language interpreters, give remote locations access to specialists and allow clinicians to monitor patients in their homes. The Telehealth Resource Centers program has been funded since 2006 by a grant from FORHP’s Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT). On September 1st, OAT awarded a new cohort of twelve regional Telehealth Resource Centers and two national TRCs. More information on the National Consortium of TRCs can be found on their website.

Approaching Deadlines

Housing farm laborers – September 11

Comments Requested: Policy for Hospital Outpatient Services – September 11

Comments Requested: Physician Fee Schedule/Diabetes Prevention – September 11

Behavioral Health Integration for Native Americans – September 16

Comments Requested: 340B Drug Pricing Program – September 20

Comments Requested: Verifying CAHs Meet Medicare Requirements – September 29
USDA Loans for Rural Broadband – September 30
Research to Reduce Tobacco Use – October 11
Comments Requested: CMS Cancels Cardiac Bundles – October 16
Comments Requested: CMS Revises Joint Replacement Bundles – October 16
Students to Service (S2S) Loan Repayment Program – October 19
Comments Requested: USDA Summer Meals Program – October 23
Address Suicide Research Gaps in Rural Communities - November 2
Drinking Water and Waste Disposal for Rural and Native Alaskan Villages – Ongoing
HIT Strategies for Patient-Reported Outcome Measures – Ongoing
HIT to Improve Health Care Quality and Outcomes – Ongoing
Community Facilities Program – Ongoing
Summer Food Service Program – Ongoing

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