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WHA and RWHC to State's Top Health Official: Prioritize Rural Hospitals in Wisconsin's Application for Competitive \$50 Billion Rural Health Grant

On Sept. 3, WHA and the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) sent a joint letter to the leadership of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) urging the agency to put Wisconsin's rural hospitals front and center in the state's application for a sizable, multi-year federal funding opportunity to support rural health care.

WHA President and CEO Kyle O'Brien and RWHC Executive Director Tim Size sent their joint letter to DHS Secretary-designee Kirsten Johnson in response to the state health agency's Request for Information on the Rural Health Transformation Program or "rural health fund," after soliciting input from Wisconsin hospital leaders.

"Fortunately, in Wisconsin, our rural hospitals are led by experienced leaders who are consistently innovating and collaborating with partners in their communities to develop solution-oriented strategies to address challenges head-on," they wrote. "But they cannot create strategies or initiatives without sustainable funding to do so."

The rural health fund is a competitive five-year, \$50 billion federal funding opportunity available to all 50 states to strengthen and support rural health care. DHS is responsible for preparing and submitting Wisconsin's application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency tasked with administering the program and making state award decisions.

Congress added the rural health fund to the federal budget reconciliation act, or One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed by President Trump on July 4 with the express intent of directing federal resources to rural hospitals. "The \$50 billion rural hospital fund is intended to provide immediate relief to rural hospitals," according to a July 30 news release from the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance.

To best position Wisconsin's application against other states vying for the rural health funds, O'Brien and Size urged Johnson and her team to craft a proposal that would direct needed resources to rural hospitals simply and with maximum flexibility, as Congress intended.

"While the needs may vary between Spooner and Shawano, or Monroe and Merrill, we know that one thing remains the same," O'Brien and Size wrote, "(T)he hospitals in these communities know how to best invest resources to meet the care needs that exist within their respective communities."

According to the CMS website, the application for states to respond to the rural health grant funding opportunity will be released in mid-September, with a submission deadline of early November and decisions awarded by December 31, 2025.

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EDUCATION EVENTS

Sep. 17, 2025

2025 Annual Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Leaders Conference

Sep. 22, 2025

Sep. 23, 2025

Inpatient Dialysis in Rural Health