# Executive Summary

## Rural Health Challenges and Solutions

### Overview

Rural healthcare organizations are the backbone of their communities, providing essential services, often with limited resources. In 2025, you will face complex challenges.

**Learn how to navigate them by turning insights into actionable strategies for success.**

### Unique Barriers in Rural Health

- Rural healthcare facilities require robust strategies to manage patient flow and staff availability during seasonal surges, while overcoming resource constraints.[1]
- Transportation issues, health literacy, and social stigmas can impede access to care.[2]
- Addressing health equity and the social determinants of health are also crucial for rural areas.[3]

### Understanding the Critical Challenges

**Workforce Shortages**

Rural areas are disproportionately affected by staffing challenges, with 90% of rural health systems reporting labor shortages.[4]

**Financial Pressures**

Operating costs are rising across the board. Healthcare facilities must contend with inflation, staffing/labor costs, supply chain issues, technology costs, and more.

**Access to Care**

Rural residents often struggle to access specialty, primary, and preventative care, leading to late diagnoses and missed opportunities for addressing behavioral health concerns.[2]

### Quick Stats

- Over 40% of total expenses that hospitals incur in delivering care to patients are attributed to administrative costs.[5]
- Nearly 52% of US hospitals are projected to operate at a loss.[6]
- The U.S. faces an estimated shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 primary care and specialist physicians by 2034.[7]
- Rural health clinics provide primary care services to more than 38.7 million people in 47 states.[8]
- There are 2.7 million Native people living in rural areas across the country, accounting for 4.9% of rural people.[9] Geography plays a substantial role in health care disparities for AI/AN people.[3]

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# Actionable Strategies and Solutions

## Workforce Solutions

To help recruit healthcare professionals, here are a few suggestions based things we've learned for successful facility staffing:

### Promote Your Community

Get providers excited to practice medicine for your community. Highlight why they would want to work there permanently or temporarily.

### Offer Flexibility

Consider options like reduced FTEs, job-sharing, or flexible schedules to attract and retain providers who prioritize work-life balance.

### Restructure Call Schedules

Implement creative scheduling solutions, such as equitable call rotations including week-on/week-off models or supplementing with external coverage.

### Offer Competitive Pay

Leveraging incentives like student loan repayment programs, sign-on bonuses, or relocation assistance to attract providers and make your community a more appealing choice.

### Seamless Onboarding

Have a well-prepared onboarding strategy in place so when a new provider is joining your team, it's a seamless transition to integrate them with other staff members and your community.

### Partner With Experts

Utilize experts in rural and remote staffing, like Wilderness Medical Staffing, to help you match the right provider with your staffing needs while ensuring continuity of care for your facility.

Healthcare leaders need to think strategically about how to keep facilities staffed. Since finding full-time healthcare professionals in rural and remote areas can be difficult, you may need to rely on locum tenens or traveling providers to fill in gaps in coverage. Since 2010, Wilderness Medical Staffing has partnered with rural and remote healthcare facilities to create sustainable solutions to staffing shortages.

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# Actionable Strategies and Solutions

## Financial Strategies

Healthcare leaders should prioritize growth, cost reduction, and efficiency. Leveraging technology can reduce administrative overhead, while strategic staffing—whether full-time, locum tenens, or a mix—ensures continuous care, stable billable hours, and community access to healthcare.

## Community Partnerships

Healthcare leaders might need to utilize resources outside of their organization to bring high-quality healthcare to their communities. To foster growth in this area, partnering or collaborating with tech companies, educational institutions, and community organizations can bridge gaps in care.

## Focus on the Patient Experience

Creating positive patient experiences is a top priority with healthcare organizations adopting strategies from industries like retail and hospitality to improve satisfaction. Addressing patient pain points—like wait times, office hours, and transportation, can ease barriers to care. Offering specialized services and improving care coordination can help retain patients locally.

## Improving Access To Care

Adding in-house services like chemo, dialysis, or mental health care can enhance patient access while generating new revenue. Mobile health or virtual options further improve outcomes by increasing accessibility. Affordability should also be prioritized, as high costs may deter patients from seeking care.

## Technology and Innovation

Technology adaptation and growth are skyrocketing, providing healthcare leaders with more resources to combat critical challenges. Focuses on technology will include increased patient portal adoption, virtual care, security measures, AI, and data collection and reporting.

## How We Help

At Wilderness Medical Staffing, we focus on helping healthcare executives like you address the unique staffing challenges rural facilities face. We specialize in matching the right providers to your specific needs, ensuring your facility is staffed with highly qualified professionals ready to provide excellent healthcare to your community.

Through our proactive approach, we help you alleviate staffing shortages, reduce burnout, and maintain the quality of care your community relies on. Our expertise extends to building strong partnerships with organizations like yours and fostering talent pipelines to support the long-term sustainability of your workforce.

## Sources:


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