Agenda At-a-Glance

RHA 32nd Annual Conference

Transforming Rural Health: Aligning People, Policy & Practice

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2026

Pre-Conference | 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. EST

Topic: Putting Compliance into Action: From Regulations to Results
Presenter: Kate Hill, RN, VP of Rural Health | The Compliance Team
Location: *Wiley*

This talk explores how clinics can move beyond simply understanding regulatory requirements to build practical, effective compliance programs. Through practical insights and real-world applications, the session will highlight how compliance can become a part of everyday clinic life so that all the focus is on providing the best care possible for rural patients.

Topic: Palmetto GBA Trends and Updates
Presenter: Jamela Hillary-Harris, MHRM, BBA | Senior Provider Relations Representative – Palmetto GBA
Location: *Wiley*

Stay informed on the latest trends, updates and key developments from Palmetto GBA. This session will highlight timely information and practical insights to help Rural Health Clinics stay current and prepared.

Topic: Q&A Roundtable: Ask the RHC Experts

- **Kate Hill, RN** | The Compliance Team
- **Jamela Hillary-Harris, MHRM, BBA** | Palmetto GBA
- **Cassie Beesley, CRHCP**, Owner | EmpowerRural Health Solutions
- **Megan Drewery, CRHCP, RH-CBS**, Founder | Healthcare Operations Consultant

Location: *Wiley*

11:00 – 11:30 a.m. | Break, Registration & Exhibitor Visits

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2026

11:30 – 12:30 p.m. | Opening Welcome, Luncheon and Member Meeting

Presenters: Beth Fox, MD, MPH, CPE, FAAFP, Board President | Rural Health Association of Tennessee and **Jacy Warrell, MPA,** CEO | Rural Health Association of Tennessee

Rural Health Association of Tennessee's Board President will share a few words of welcome, followed by CEO and staff who will provide exciting updates on RHA's membership growth and organizational milestones.

12:30 – 12:45 p.m. | Break – Visit Exhibits

12:45 – 1:45 p.m. | Afternoon Plenary | Rural Health Sustainability through Unapologetic Advocacy

Presenter: Jeremiah (JJ) J. Hodshire, President & CEO | Hillsdale Hospital

1:45 – 2:00 p.m. | Break – Visit Exhibits

2:00 – 3:00 p.m. | Breakout Sessions

1. Childhood Health
The Transformative Power of a Tiny Seed: Cultivating Growth, Clarity & Connection

Presenter: Sara Rubens, Owner | Seed to Sanctuary
Location: *Wiley*

What if one tiny seed could transform not only what is on your plate, but how you experience your life? In this inspiring and practical talk, Sara Rubens, founder of Seed to Sanctuary, shares how growing food can cultivate greater clarity, connection, and well-being. Through her approachable 5-step framework, attendees gain the confidence and practical tools to grow food and live more intentionally.

2. Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
When Resources Meet Real Life: Tennessee Community Compass in Action

Moderators: Jaimie Riccitelli, MPS, Community Engagement Director | RHA and **Wendy Stewart, BA, CRS-A/D,** Lead Community Engagement Specialist | RHA
Panelists: David Johnson, Community Services Director | Southeast TN Human Resources Agency and **Cassie O'Neil,** Assistant Director of Community

Services | Southeast TN Human Resources Agency and **Martha Dixon**, Community Services Manager | Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency
Location: *Milani*

Learn how **Tennessee Community Compass** connects individuals, families and providers with essential community resources, helping bridge the gap between available services and real-life needs.

3. Healthcare Workforce
2026 Human Resources Year in Review & Trends to Watch in 2027

Presenter: Joel Cullum, Senior VP | SESCO Management Consultants
Location: *Hope*

An insightful review of the most significant developments in Human Resources over the past year, alongside an in-depth look at the key employment regulations and HR trends shaping 2027. We will discuss the biggest shifts in HR policies, compliance challenges, and workforce dynamics of 2026 and forecast for 2027. We'll examine upcoming regulatory changes, emerging trends, and cutting-edge HR strategies, ensuring you're prepared to navigate the evolving future of work.

4. Rural Health Safety Net
Capacity & Consent in Court: Understanding Decision-Making in Vulnerable Adults

Presenter: Raymond Romano, PhD, MPH, FNP-BC, Nurse Practitioner | Vanderbilt Memory & Alzheimer's Center
Location: *Armstrong*

This presentation explores decision-making capacity and informed consent in Alzheimer's disease across the clinical continuum. Attendees will review how cognitive impairment affects medical decision-making, practical approaches to capacity assessment, and ethical and legal considerations in dementia care. The session emphasizes real-world challenges faced by clinicians and highlights strategies to support patient autonomy, surrogate decision-makers, and interdisciplinary care teams.

5. Health Promotion
No Longer Hidden in Plain Sight! A Problem-Based Learning Activity on Drug Prevention and Rural Planning Strategies

Presenters: Simpfronia Taylor, Ed.D., Director, Community Grants and Programs | University of Tennessee Martin, Ripley Center and **Xavier Andrews,** Executive Director | Prevention Alliance of Lauderdale County
Location: *Clark*

This interactive Problem-Based Learning (PBL) workshop will engage participants in a hands-on learning strategy for youth engagement. Through a collaborative and engaging rural prevention scenario, participants will work together to identify strategies to discuss health issues with students. Participants will also learn how grant funding can be leveraged to support innovative prevention initiatives.

3:00 – 3:15 p.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

3:15 – 4:15 p.m. | Breakout Sessions

1. Childhood Health
Beyond the Puff: Tiered Supports to Strengthen Tobacco & Vaping Interventions

Presenters: Nathan Wray, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist and **Jenny Wright,** Community in Schools Program Manager | Oakdale School and **Patricia Pace**, Assistant Director of School, Coordinated School Health Director | Morgan County Schools
Location: *Wiley*

This session highlights how Morgan County Schools has redesigned its response to tobacco and vaping offenses through a comprehensive, tiered intervention system that supports the whole student. Participants will learn how the district blends accountability with meaningful wrap-around services while utilizing current school-based partnerships to provide individual student support.

2. Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
From Data to Action: Using Population Health Analytics to Transform Rural Healthcare in Tennessee

Presenter: Matthew Harris, PhD., Boyd Distinguished Professor of Health Economics | TN Rural Health Care Center of Excellence, UTHSC
Location: *Milani*

This presentation highlights findings from the TN Rural Health Care Center of Excellence evaluation, integrating community and healthcare practice surveys with 2025 TennCare claims data to identify rural healthcare priorities. Participants will learn how population health analytics and geographic hotspot analyses can identify healthcare disparities.

3. Healthcare Workforce
Strengthening Succession Planning

Presenter: Jennifer Sanchez, Director of Business & Grants Management | Tennessee Department of Health
Location: *Hope*

Teams face turnover, retirements, and burnout while relying on informal knowledge transfer and unclear roles. This presentation describes a workforce development initiative using job deconstruction and teach-back sessions to improve continuity, transparency, and succession planning. Attendees will learn how these tools make invisible work visible, identify workflow gaps, promote shared ownership, improve workload equity, preserve institutional knowledge, and strengthen operational resilience.

4. Rural Health Safety Net
Nourish Recovery: A Trauma-Informed Nutrition Pilot for Rural Recovery Settings

Presenter: Kristin Riggsbee, PhD, RDN/LDN, Assistant Professor, Nutrition and Food Safety Specialist | University of Tennessee Extension
Location: *Armstrong*

Extension specialists will share the development and early implementation of Nourish Recovery, a trauma-informed nutrition pilot for adults in substance use recovery. The session will highlight how the program was adapted for rural settings, partnered with recovery-serving organizations, and delivered in resource-limited environments. Presenter will discuss practical implementation lessons, curriculum flexibility, and strategies for supporting staff engaged in emotionally demanding recovery work.

5. Health Promotion
Expanding Access, Saving Costs: A Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Medicaid Family Planning Waiver in Tennessee

Presenters: Wondosen Samuel, PhD, Research Assistant Professor, Department of Health Services Management and Policy | East Tennessee State University and **Amal J Khoury PhD, MPH**, Professor and Chair, Department of Health Services Management and Policy Director, Center for Applied Research and Evaluation in Women's Health | East Tennessee State University
Location: *Clark*

This study projects the costs and benefits of implementing a Medicaid family planning waiver in Tennessee, covering both women's contraceptive services and vasectomy for men. Using a population-based modeling approach that draws on Tennessee ACS data, peer-state Medicaid enrollment and utilization rates, and South Carolina and Alabama Medicaid claims data, we project program costs and Medicaid savings from pregnancies averted and estimate net savings under alternative scenarios.

END OF DAY ONE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2026

7:45 – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast | Outside Main Ballroom

8:30 – 9:30 a.m. | Morning Plenary Session | From Impossible to Inevitable: Leading Innovation in Rural Health Through Evidence, Advocacy, and Collaboration

Presenter: Rikki Harris, MAMFC, MACE, PhD (ABD), CEO | TN Voices | Ambassador | Americans for Ibogaine

9:30 – 9:45 a.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

9:45 - 10:45 a.m. | Breakout Sessions

1. Childhood Health
Providing Students Hope & Healing: The BEST Way

Presenters: Sharon Wheeler, B.E.S.T. Groups Coordinator | Monroe County Juvenile Services and **Kasey Moses**, School Counselor | Monroe County School System
Location: *Wiley*

Provide Hope and Healing for students. Discover ways to fund, implement, and sustain BEST (Be Each Other's Support Team) Peer Groups for students. BEST is a powerful, research-based curriculum supporting students coping with loss. Loss and grief can be caused by death, addiction, incarceration, and other major life changes. Participants will gain tools, data, and insights from real success stories to help create safe spaces for peer connection, healing, and renewed hope.

2. Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
Evaluating Clinical Artificial Intelligence at Multiple Rural Hospitals in a Single Network

Presenter: Katherine Brown, PhD, Postdoctoral Research Fellow | Vanderbilt University Medical Center
Location: *Milani*

Clinical prediction models (CPMs) are often the victim of performance changes when applied at an external site. Optimizing CPMs to maximize performance at local, potentially rural, sites require access to sufficient data volumes. We present an analysis of three hospitals in a Tennessee network (2/3 rural) to demonstrate that rural medical centers may not have appropriate data volume to facilitate proper model optimization and discuss the downstream impact on model performance equality.

3. Healthcare Workforce
Shift The Script: Mindset Tools That Reduce Burnout and Strengthen Rural Health Teams

Presenter: Nicole Phillips, Founder | Kindness is Contagious, LLC
Location: *Hope*

Rural health professionals give everything to their communities, often with fewer resources and more pressure than anyone sees. This session offers practical, research-grounded mindset tools, not toxic positivity, to help teams interrupt autopilot reactions, manage stress, and guard against burnout. Drawing on confirmation bias and the science of attention, Nicole Phillips shows how shifting what we notice rebuilds resilience, trust, and connection across the most stretched rural health teams.

4. Rural Health Safety Net
Human Trafficking in Rural Tennessee

Presenter: Sarah McKinnis, CEO & Co-Founder | WillowBend Farms, Inc.
Location: *Armstrong*

This presentation will highlight the prevalence of Human Trafficking and the impact of vulnerability factors in rural communities that impact individuals and increase susceptibility to becoming victims of trafficking. We will also discuss a proven blueprint of what and how rural communities can effectively address these issues collaboratively.

5. Health Promotion
Voices for a Safer Tennessee (Safer TN): Advancing Firearm Safety Through Community Action

Presenters: Nycole Gentry, East Tennessee Coalition Coordinator | Voices for a Safer Tennessee (Safer TN) and **S. Dave Bhattacharya, MD**, Pediatric Trauma Medical Director | Erlanger Children's Hospital
Location: *Clark*

In this presentation, we will discuss the efforts of Voices for a Safer Tennessee (Safer TN), a nonpartisan grassroots organization committed to reducing preventable firearm tragedies across Tennessee, with a focus on rural areas. Safer TN's work touches on childhood health through reducing accidental shootings, as well as behavioral health by highlighting the issue of rural suicides in the state.

10:45 – 11:00 a.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

11:00 – 12:00 p.m. | Breakout Sessions

1. Childhood Health
Realizing Resilience through Community: Intentional Parent Peer Support for Families of Young Children

Presenters: *Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services*
Melissa Binkley, MS, ECMH-E®, Mentor-Policy, Director, Office of Infant & Early Childhood Initiatives and **Jaime Herndon, FSS**, Program Coordinator, Parent Peer, Regional Intervention Program (RIP) and **Ashley Jasinski, MS**, Training & Technical Assistance Coordinator, Office of Infant & Early Childhood Initiatives and **Jasmine Davis, FSS, ECMH-E®,** Resource Consultant, Parent Peer, Regional Intervention Program (RIP)
Location: *Wiley*

The TDMHSAS Regional Intervention Program (RIP) & Parenting That Works helps families of young children experiencing challenging behaviors through parent-led, professionally supported services. Since 1969, RIP has placed peer support and lived experience at the heart of its model. This session explores why parent-to-parent connections are critical to resilience, relational health, and lifelong mental health, and how RIP puts those connections into practice every day.

2. Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
From Friction to Glow: Reimagining Clinic Workflows without the Stress

Presenter: Cassie Beesley, CRHCP, Owner and CEO | EmpowerRural Health Solutions, LLC
Location: *Milani*

In rural clinics, workflow inefficiencies don't just burn out staff—they stall patient access, delay billing, and directly compromise the quality of patient outcomes. This session offers an insider's guide to diagnosing bottlenecks from the front desk to the back office. Learn how to co-create practical, low-stress solutions with your team to streamline operations, accelerate cash flow, and ensure your clinic consistently delivers the high-quality care your community deserves.

3. Healthcare Workforce
Thinking Outside the Pipeline: Creating Authentic Healthcare Career Experiences in Rural Tennessee

Presenters: Sarah Kane, Community Engagement Manager | Tennessee Center for Health Workforce Development and **Amy Dunaway**, Executive Director | Blount Memorial Foundation
Location: *Hope*

What if the future of rural healthcare workforce development isn't about moving students through a pipeline, but surrounding them with opportunities to discover what's possible? Learn how TCWD's Pathway Development Program is creating authentic healthcare experiences while inspiring communities to become active partners in developing tomorrow's workforce.

4. Rural Health Safety Net
Meeting Rural Communities Where They Are: The McMinn County Area Resource Van

Presenters: Joe Guy, BS, POST, EMT | McMinn County Sheriff's Office and **Sara Kite**, Extension Agent III | UT Extension McMinn County
Location: *Armstrong*

A partnership between the Sheriff's Office and local Resource Council involves taking resource agency personnel out into the community to personally connect at-risk individuals with area resources they would otherwise not know about. Attendees will learn how innovative partnerships can result in successful and meaningful projects and results that positively impact a community.

5. Health Promotion
Hot Topics in Public Health: Emerging Health Trends

Presenters: *Tennessee Department of Health*
Christine Thomas, DO, MPH, Medical Director for HIV, STI, Viral Hepatitis, and TB Programs and **Caitlin Newhouse, MD, MPH**, Medical Director, Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Immunization Program and **Melissa Dulcey, DVM, PhD, DACVPM**, State Public Health Veterinarian and Assistant Director for the Waterborne and Zoonotic Disease Program
Location: *Clark*

Representatives from the Tennessee Department of Health's Division of Communicable and Environmental Diseases and Emergency Preparedness will take participants through a series of interactive case-based scenarios. Scenarios will highlight recognition, diagnosis, prevention, and management of several infectious diseases that are critical for public health. Infections discussed will include measles, congenital syphilis, New World screwworm, travel-associated high-consequence pathogens, and more.

12:00 – 12:30 p.m. | Awards Luncheon & Networking

12:30 – 1:15 p.m. | Presentation of Awards

Presenters: Dr. Rick Wallace, Poster Contest Chair **|** East Tennessee State University and **RHA Board of Directors/Staff**

1:15 – 1:30 p.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

1:30 – 2:15 p.m. | Afternoon Plenary | Updates from the Tennessee Department of Health

Presenters: John Dunn, DVM, PhD, Commissioner and **JW Randolph, MPH**, Deputy Commissioner for Health Infrastructure

2:15 – 2:30 p.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

2:30 – 3:30 p.m. | Breakout Sessions

1. Childhood Health
HOPE 101 (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences)

Presenter: Tabatha Floyd, BS, CPS II, Program Coordinator, HOPE Champion | Centerstone
Location: *Wiley*

Positive experiences can ease toxic stress and help children grow into more resilient, healthier adults. HOPE identifies ways that communities and systems of care can ensure all children have more positive experiences and that all families have support to nurture and celebrate their strengths. Everyone deserves a chance to thrive! Come learn the concepts of HOPE and how to apply them in your work!

2. Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
Meeting Community Needs: Rural Health Access Success Stories

Presenters: Ellen Pruitt, Marketing/Human Resources Manager | Hometown Health Clinic and **Marlita White, MBA,** CEO | Hardeman County Community Health Center
Location: *Milani*

Discover how rural health organizations are responding to community needs through innovative approaches that expand access, strengthen services, and improve care. Presenters will share real-world success stories and practical strategies from their communities.

3. Healthcare Workforce
Staff Wellness: Supporting Our School Staff

Presenter: Heather Ledbetter, Ed.D., PH, Coordinated School Health Coordinator | Maryville City Schools
Location: *Hope*

Healthy school staff are essential to healthy schools and communities. This presentation explores practical, low-cost strategies to promote employee wellness in school settings, ways to reduce burnout, and foster a culture of support. Participants will leave with actionable ideas to improve staff well-being while strengthening morale, engagement, and retention.

4. Rural Health Safety Net
911 as a Rural Access Strategy to Enable Public Pathways to Patient-Centered Care

Presenter: Janel Paulk, DBA, MBA, Assistant Professor | East Tennessee State University
Location: *Armstrong*

In rural Tennessee, 911 is often the most reliable way for patients to reach care. That drives avoidable ambulance transports, ED crowding, and EMS strain. This session shows how 911-integrated telehealth triages low-acuity calls in real time and routes patients to the right care. We'll cover the operating model, lessons from rural and frontier deployments, and a Tennessee measurement framework built with East Tennessee State University and aligned to the Rural Health Transformation Program.

5. Health Promotion
Tennessee's Livability Indicators Dashboard: A County-Level Health Data Resource

Presenter: John W. Vick, Ph.D., Director, Office of Primary Prevention | Tennessee Department of Health and **Qian Huang, PhD, MA, MPA**, Research Assistant Professor | East Tennessee State University
Location: *Clark*

The Tennessee Livability Collaborative, a state government working group facilitated by TDH, partnered with the ETSU Center for Rural Health and Research to create the statewide Livability Indicators dashboard. This new resource centralizes over 70 social determinants of health data indicators at the county-level. This session provides an overview of the collaborative process used to develop the project, and a demonstration of the dashboard and its functionality for planning and assessment.

3:30 – 3:45 p.m. | Break & Exhibitor Visits

3:45 – 4:00 p.m. | Announcements, Silent Auction and Door Prizes
(Silent Auction ends at 4:00 p.m. Must Be Present to Win)

END OF DAY TWO

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2026

7:45 – 8:30 a.m. | Breakfast – Ballroom C & D

8:30 – 9:30 a.m. | Morning Plenary | Growing the Rural Health Workforce: Talent Pipelines that Work for Every Community

Presenter: Deniece Thomas, Deputy Commissioner | Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development

9:30 – 9:45 a.m. | Break & Final Exhibitor Visits

9:45 – 10:45 a.m. | Closing Plenary | Funding Rural Health: Insights from Funders and Grant Reviewers

Moderator: Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D., MCHES®, NBC-HWC, Director | MTSU Center for Health and Human Services

Panelists:

State Perspective

Amanda Ables, MPA, Director of Healthcare Partnerships | Tennessee Department of Health

Regional Perspective

Jillian White, Appalachian Regional Commission State Program Manager | Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

Federal Perspective

Maribel Nunez, Public Health Analyst | Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, HRSA

10:45 – 11:00 a.m. | Closing Remarks, Door Prizes & Conference Adjournment

ADJOURN CONFERENCE