

## 2023 Advocacy Priorities

Since 1995, the mission of Rural Health Association of Tennessee (RHA) ([www.tnruralhealth.org](http://www.tnruralhealth.org)) is to lead the way to a healthy Tennessee through partnerships, advocacy, education, and resources. Our 600<sup>+</sup> members include rural hospitals, clinics, school health professionals, mental and behavioral health providers, and others who work to address health disparities in rural and other minority populations.

Through interviews, listening sessions, and surveys, RHA has identified the below areas as the top policy priorities:

- **Rural Health Infrastructure** – Investments in rural health programs is a small portion of healthcare spending, but it is critical to rural Tennesseans. Safety net programs expand access to health care, improve health outcomes, and increase the quality and efficiency of health care delivery in the state. RHA advocates for a strong Safety Net Infrastructure that is inclusive of federally designated Rural Health Clinics who offer sliding fee scales.
- **Rural Health Equity** – Rural and other underserved populations encounter barriers to healthcare that limit their ability to obtain the care they need. Addressing rural inequities and declining life expectancy rates are a top priority in 2023. RHA supports initiatives that increase access to care including school health programs, Medicaid Expansion, expanding broadband and telehealth services, and advancing quality of care in rural communities.
- **Rural Health Workforce** – 100% of Tennessee’s rural counties are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care, obstetrics, dental health, and mental and behavioral health. These workforce issues are not limited to higher credentialed medical providers, but also entry level positions such as certified nursing assistants, dental hygienists, and peer recovery specialists. RHA supports innovative programs aimed at recruiting, retaining, and upskilling rural healthcare workforce.
- **Teenage Pregnancy and Maternal Mortality Prevention** - Teenage Pregnancy has been identified as the “top health factor” influencing health in Tennessee’s rural communities. At the same time, Tennessee has among the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the nation. RHA advocates for programs and policies that prevent teenage pregnancy, provides case management services to pregnant women, and advances professional knowledge of providers.
- **Rural Health Clinic Modernization** – The largest group of primary care providers in rural communities are federally designated Rural Health Clinics (RHC). While Tennessee’s Federal Congressional Delegation has been overwhelmingly supportive of RHCs, Tennessee fails to recognize and support this group of providers. RHA stands with the more than 200 independent and provider-based clinics that deserve to participate in state funded provider loan repayment programs, residency incentives, and other programs aimed at improving quality of care.