

# South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program

Program Handbook | Updated March 2025

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# South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Overview

## About the Program

The South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program provides incentives for behavioral or mental health care professionals who commit to practice in a non-urbanized area of South Carolina in an outpatient setting for a period of four years.

All recipients must have completed an accredited graduate training program, hold a valid and active license or work for the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) as a Mental Health Professional (MHP), and be employed full- or half-time in the provision of behavioral or mental health care to patients in a non-urbanized area in South Carolina.

**Specifically, the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program may provide funding in the following amounts:**

Provider Type	Practice location	Incentive Amount
Qualified behavioral health professionals (full-time)	Non-urbanized area	\$15,000 per year for up to four years
Qualified behavioral health professionals (part-time)	Non-urbanized area	\$7,500 per year for up to four years

### Notes

- Telehealth providers will be considered if their practice site is located in a qualifying non-urbanized area, and care is provided to patients based in non-urbanized areas within South Carolina.
- Half-time option (minimum of 20 hours per week) for half of the full-time (minimum of 36 hours per week) funding amount may be considered.

\*Please see the [Eligibility](#) section for assistance to determine eligibility of a specific practice address.

## Funding Source

The Legislature of South Carolina provides that the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) is the state agency responsible for administering the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (AHEC) program. A high priority of South Carolina AHEC is the recruitment and placement of behavioral health professionals into **non-urbanized areas**. The Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program was initiated by the South Carolina Legislature in 2024 via proviso to address the undersupply of behavioral health and mental health professionals in rural and underserved South Carolina communities. The funds for this program are appropriated to MUSC and the program is administered by South Carolina AHEC.

The program provides funding to clinical nurse specialists in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, CNS), Psychologists (PhD, PsyD), Social Workers (LMSW, LISW), Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT), Licensed Addiction Counselors and Mental Health Professionals (MPH) employed at the South Carolina Department of Mental Health who contract for a period of four years to practice in non-urbanized areas of South Carolina in an outpatient setting. This program does not connect professionals with employment, applicants must be employed at an eligible site to participate.

## Board

The program is administered by South Carolina AHEC and managed by the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Board, the members of which are defined in the South Carolina Code of Laws. This board meets periodically to vote on applicants and discuss other items of business. The board is composed of the following representatives: the Chief Executive Officer, or his designee, of the South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH); a representative from the South Carolina Primary Care Office of the Department of Public Health (SCDPH); a behavioral health professional; a representative from the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH); and a staff member from the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (SC AHEC). This board serves without compensation.

## Program Details

### Priority

The intent of this program is to assist behavioral health professionals in establishing or joining practices in non-urbanized areas of the state. Candidates are prioritized using an objective checklist that awards points for categories such as community need and employment factors.

### Eligibility

To be eligible for this program, all applicants must:

- Have completed an accredited graduate training program and hold a valid and active license or work for the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) as a Mental Health Professional (MHP)
- Be in an eligible profession/role. Providers within these disciplines with associate licenses are eligible to apply:
  - Clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, CNS)
  - Psychologist (PhD, PsyD)
  - Social worker (LMSW, LISW)
  - Licensed professional counselor (LPC)
  - Marriage and family therapist (LMFT)
  - Licensed addiction counselor
  - Mental Health Professional (MHP) employed at the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)
- Provide behavioral/mental health care in an outpatient setting in a **non-urbanized area** (see section below if you are unsure about your practice location's eligibility)
- Work 36 hrs/week to qualify for full-time incentives, 20 hrs/week for part-time incentives
- Be a U.S. citizen
- Preference will be given for applicants who have practiced in the community less than 5 years at time of application
- Must not have an outstanding contractual service obligation to the federal government (i.e., National Health Service Corps), the state government (i.e., Rural Provider Incentive Program), or any other entity

### How do I know if I practice in a non-urbanized location?

The Rural Health Information Hub's "Am I Rural?" tool\* can be useful in determining if your practice location is in a non-urbanized area.\*\* To run a self-query, follow the steps below:

1. Navigate to [www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural)
2. Enter your practice location in the text box and click "Locate"
3. Click "Run Report" in the location information on the map next to the address
4. On the results page, scroll down to the "Program Eligibility" section
5. Check the "CMS Rural Health Clinic (RHC) Program" row:
  - a. If it says "Yes" – your practice location is non-urbanized.
  - b. If it says, "No" – your practice location is urbanized and not eligible for this program.

\*The “Am I Rural?” tool is a product of the Rural Health Information Hub (RHlhub) and available on their website at [www.ruralhealthinfo.org](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org). It is one of many tools to determine if a location falls under federal definitions for urban/non-urban as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau. If you have concerns about how your practice location is defined, please contact us.

\*\*Practice location eligibility is based on status at the time of application review by the Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program board.

## Application Process

Applications for the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program will open in January and are due in April. Precise application dates will be posted on the [Recruitment & Retention webpage](#) during the application period. Completed applications will be considered by the Board shortly after the application period closes. No late applications will be accepted.

Accepted applicants will be notified if they receive funding in July and more information about contracts will be provided at that time. Emails will be sent to all applicants indicating if they were approved or not approved.

## Steps to Apply

1. Complete the Eligibility Form via the “Apply” button on the [Recruitment & Retention webpage](#).
2. If eligible, you will be routed to the full application. If not eligible, please review the [Eligibility](#) section.
3. Please complete the online application in the Submittable portal. You can save as a draft and return to submit when completed.
4. You will receive a confirmation email after submitting your application. **If you do not receive a confirmation email from Submittable within 24 hours, please contact [retention@scahec.net](mailto:retention@scahec.net).**

## Required Documentation

All application materials must be submitted online through the Submittable portal by the deadline to be considered. We will not accept any applications or documents via email, mail or fax. **For your application to be considered complete, you must upload all required materials to your application in Submittable, including:**

- Initial Eligibility Form
- Application, which includes:
  - Demographic, practice, and licensure information
  - Proof of U.S. citizenship
  - Practice type, location, and employment status
- Completed Practice Site Form\* (This form is available for download within the application. It must be completed by the practice manager and uploaded to your application in Submittable.)
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)

\* **Please note:** you must have a practice site/employment location secured to be eligible for this program. For resources for identifying non-urbanized employment opportunities in South Carolina, please visit the [South Carolina Office of Rural Health's \(SCORH\) website](#).

### Contract

Accepted providers will sign a contract with South Carolina AHEC and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to practice behavioral health in an underserved area for a designated amount of time. The terms of the contract stipulate that all providers will accept both Medicare and Medicaid patients and their practice will not discriminate against any person on the basis of their ability to pay. Continuation of the contracts from year to year is contingent upon the availability of funds allocated by the South Carolina General Assembly. Accepted providers are expected to maintain an outpatient behavioral health practice at the designated location.

### Payment

Payment schedules will be determined by the total amount of award and will be included in the contracts. Payments are made annually at the end of the contract year. If the practitioner leaves the employment of the practice during the contract year, the practitioner will be considered to have terminated the contract and will not receive the annual payment.

### More Information

For in-depth information about the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program, visit [www.scahec.net/recruitment](http://www.scahec.net/recruitment).