

South Carolina Rural Provider Incentive Program

Program Handbook | Updated February 2025

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South Carolina Rural Provider Incentive Program Overview

About the Program

The South Carolina Rural Provider Incentive Program provides financial incentives for primary care physicians and advanced practice professionals who commit to practice in a rural or underserved area of South Carolina in an outpatient setting for a period of four years. To date, the program has funded over 500 primary care providers in rural communities throughout the state. Statistics have shown that retention rates are greatly enhanced if these professionals remain in the site for four or more years. Since 1990, 89% of physicians who were awarded financial incentives are actively practicing in South Carolina.

All recipients must be licensed by the State of South Carolina and board certified. Applications are encouraged from residents who will be completing their training with the year, and it is expected that the resident will become board certified.

Specifically, the SC Rural Provider Incentive Program may fund:

Provider Type	Practice Location	Incentive Amount
Qualified Physicians	Counties with a population less than 50,000	\$25,000 per year for up to four years
	Counties with a population over 50,000 who work in rural areas (non-urbanized)* or who work in federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in urban areas	\$15,000 per year for up to four years
Qualified Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) and Physician Assistants (PAs)	Counties with a population less than 50,000	\$12,500 per year for up to four years
	Counties with a population over 50,000 who work in rural areas (non-urbanized)* or who work in federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in urban areas	\$7,500 per year for up to four years

Notes

- Clinicians (physicians and advanced practice providers) working in state prisons may qualify.
- 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 contact retention@scahec.net for assistance to determine eligibility of a specific practice address.

Funding Source

The Rural Physician Program was initiated by the South Carolina Legislature in 1989 to address the undersupply of clinicians in rural and underserved South Carolina communities. The state legislature 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 healthcare providers, for which the state legislature has provided funds to SC AHEC to assist primary care physicians in designated underserved areas of the state.

The program provides funding to primary care physicians (Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, and Ob/Gyn) who contract for a period of four years to practice in rural or underserved areas of South Carolina in an outpatient setting. The program also provides funding to general surgeons and psychiatrists who contract for a period of four years in rural or underserved areas of South Carolina. The amount of the award will vary with the minimum award being \$60,000 and the maximum award being \$100,000 depending upon the type of practice setting and the population of the county.

Recognizing the need for advanced practice professionals in underserved areas as well, the Rural Physician Board accepts applications from credentialed nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and physician assistants who contract for a period of four years to practice in a rural or underserved part of South Carolina in an outpatient setting. The amount of the award will vary with the minimum award being \$30,000 and the maximum award being \$50,000 depending upon the type of practice setting and the population of the county. The number of awards vary from year to year based on the demand for limited funds.

Board

The program is administered by South Carolina AHEC and managed by the Rural Physician 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 Rural Physician Board is composed of representatives from the South Carolina Primary Health Care Association, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC), the South Carolina Hospital Association (SCHA), the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, an appointee of the South Carolina House of Representatives Medical, Military, Public and Municipal Affairs Committee, an appointee of the South Carolina Senate Medical Affairs Committee, and three at-large members with two representing nursing and one representing allied health sciences.

Program Details

Priority

The intent of this program is to assist physicians and advanced practice professionals in establishing or joining practices in rural or underserved areas. Ideally, during the four-year period of commitment, they will develop viable practices and become involved in their communities, so that they will continue practicing in the areas after the funding period is over. Priority for this program will be given to those demonstrating need and expressing honest intent to remain in the underserved area once funding is completed. Candidates are prioritized using an objective checklist that awards points for categories such as community need, specialty and retention factors (e.g., education and/or training in South Carolina).

Eligibility

To be eligible for this program, all applicants must:

- Be primary care physicians (family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, OB/GYN) as well as general surgeons and psychiatrists
- Be nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and physician assistants in the above specialties
- Practice in an outpatient setting in an underserved area*
- Work 36 hrs/week to qualify for full-time incentives, 20 hrs/week for part-time incentives
- Be a U.S. citizen
- Have practiced in the community for less than five years
- **NOT** have previously received an award from the Rural Provider Incentive Program or Rural Physician Loan Repayment Program

*see page 2 of the [Rural Provider Incentive Program One-Pager](#) for county designations

Application Process

Applications for the Rural Provider Incentive Program generally open each year in October and are due in March. 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.**

Required Documentation

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

- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- 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.)

* **Please note:** you must have a practice site/employment location secured to be eligible for this program. For resources for identifying rural 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 medicine 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 and a contract from SC DHHS. Accepted providers are expected to maintain an outpatient primary care 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 Provider Incentive Program, visit www.scahec.net/recruitment.