

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A paved road runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right. The road is flanked by green fields and some trees. The overall scene is lush and green, with long shadows cast across the fields.

Impact Report

2024

SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF
RURAL HEALTH

Investment. Opportunity. Health.

SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH

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The South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH) is a non-profit organization with a mission to close the gap in health status and life expectancy between rural and urban communities in the Palmetto State. SCORH has been promoting investment, opportunity, and health within rural communities since 1991.

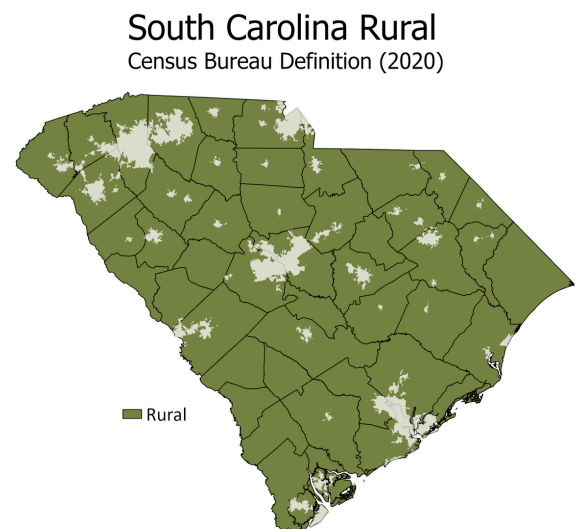
Like its peer organizations in each state, SCORH is the sole organization in South Carolina that is federally designated to address the health needs in rural communities. SCORH works with local, state, and national partners to:

- 1 Increase access to quality health care,
- 2 Improve the social drivers that contribute to a community's overall health, and
- 3 Connect available resources across the state with local needs in rural communities.

To accomplish these goals, SCORH:

- Provides technical and financial assistance to healthcare providers,
- Advocates to local and state leaders to encourage rural-friendly policy, and
- Invests in educational activities and health programs at the local level.

With **32 percent** of our state's residents living in rural areas, SCORH believes in preserving the unique character of rural communities without compromising their opportunities and access to critical services.



A Letter from the CEO

I am excited to share this year's 2024 Annual Report, highlighting the progress and initiatives we've undertaken to tackle rural health challenges. Over the past year, our commitment to improving healthcare access and outcomes in rural communities has led to meaningful impacts—made possible by the dedication of our community partners, rural providers, grant funders, and many others. We sincerely thank all those working to prioritize rural health initiatives.



Our efforts span various focus areas, but as you'll see in the following pages, we remain committed to strategic initiatives that enhance healthcare delivery, address non-medical drivers of health, and respond to the unique challenges rural communities face.

In 2024, SCORH provided over 1,970 technical assistance activities to support hospitals, practices, and partners. The SCORH/Family Solutions program once again achieved a significant milestone by reporting zero infant deaths among its participants! Additionally, the organization expanded its behavioral health simulation, Empathy in Action: a walk in our shoes, by hosting events in Columbia, Georgetown, Seneca, and Pickens, furthering its impact on behavioral health awareness. SCORH also played a key role in securing funding for rural infrastructure, strengthening resources and support for underserved communities.

Looking ahead, we will continue working to close the health gap between rural and urban areas. As the healthcare landscape evolves, we are committed to fostering collaboration and strengthening partnerships to build healthier, more resilient rural communities in 2025.

Graham L. Adams, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

Empowering Families, Transforming Communities

Family Solutions (FS), a cornerstone program of the South Carolina Office of Rural Health, is committed to reducing infant mortality and improving overall health outcomes for mothers and their babies.

Innovative Community Engagement

In 2024, the **Family Resource Center (FRC)** expanded its offerings by hosting community sessions on essential topics such as doula comfort measures, breastfeeding, financial literacy, credit repair, and tax filing. These sessions drew **160 attendees**, equipping families with practical knowledge and skills for improved quality of life.

Expanding Impact

Through home visiting and community outreach, FS touched the lives of **7,422 individuals** this year. Additionally, the FRC provided over **\$8,000 in financial assistance** to families in need, covering critical expenses like utilities, rent, eviction prevention, and gas—a lifeline for many during challenging times. The overall support of the FRC reached **770 individuals** in 2024.

Success Story

A Hispanic program participant who recently moved to Allendale, SC, faced significant challenges preparing for her baby's arrival. Without a car seat, crib, breast pump, or baby clothes, and with limited transportation and financial resources, she felt overwhelmed. Language barriers added to her difficulties in finding local support.

FS provided critical support, including a car seat, breast pump, baby clothes, a swing, and a bouncer. The participant felt relieved to have Family Solutions' support, ensuring a safe sleep space and essential baby items. Grateful for the assistance, she also found a stronger sense of community. Without family nearby, she now sees FS as her support system.



Impact:

FAMILY SOLUTIONS



282



0

PREGNANT
WOMEN SERVED

INFANT &
MATERNAL
DEATHS



IN 2024, FAMILY SOLUTIONS TOUCHED THE LIVES OF...

7,422
INDIVIDUALS

"The partnership with FS has allowed our MCO to make a greater impact in rural communities by providing Medicaid information, promoting prenatal and postpartum care, and supporting families with essential supplies. It has also connected us with community organizations, fostering meaningful relationships. Initiatives like baby bags for new moms, graduate gifts, and event sponsorships have increased our presence in the communities we serve. We value our partnership with FS."

- Carolyn Lyles, Absolute Total Care
Community Relations Coordinator



COUNTIES
SERVED



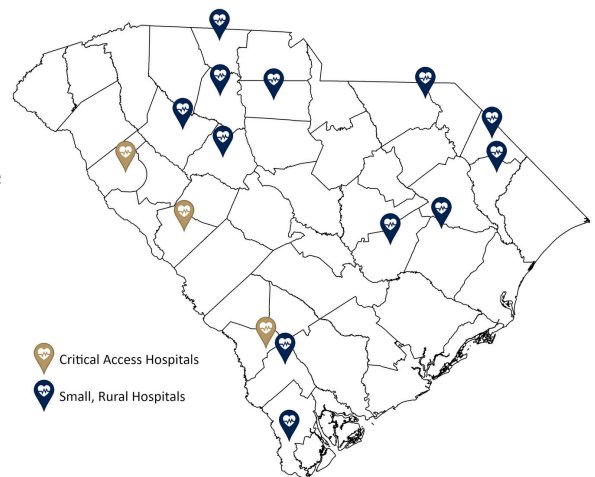
PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS



Strengthening Rural Hospitals

SCORH leveraged **\$500,000** in CDC Health Equity funds to support hospital improvements across the state. **Five** facility assessments led to four major projects completed in May 2024:

- **Allendale County Hospital:** Upgraded patient rooms and bathrooms for better infection control.
- **Hampton Regional Hospital:** Added negative pressure rooms to reduce the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Abbeville Area Medical Center:** Built a mobile, drive-thru pavilion for screenings and vaccinations.
- **McLeod Health Dillon:** Improved air handling systems for infection prevention.



SCORH also developed tools to assist hospitals in applying for DHHS infrastructure grants, offering support in brainstorming, grant writing, and application reviews which resulted in access to almost **\$50 million** for rural infrastructure.

Through a partnership with the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), **14 small rural hospitals** received funding and technical assistance to enhance inpatient quality, along with continued support for South Carolina's **three Critical Access Hospitals**.

SCORH remains committed to ensuring rural hospitals stay viable and continue to provide essential care to their communities.

RURAL HEALTH CLINIC SERVICES



268
CONTACTS MADE
WITH RHCS

SCORH provided technical assistance, billing and coding support, quality initiatives, and interpretation of federal regulations.



69
SITE
VISITS

SCORH's Provider Service team completed RHC visits in 21 counties.



11
SCHOLARSHIPS
AWARDED

SCORH awarded scholarships to 11 individuals in 8 counties to take the Certified Rural Health Clinic Professional (CRHCP) Certification through the National Association of Rural Health Clinics.

Investing in Rural EMS

In 2024, SCORH reinforced its commitment to strengthening rural EMS by expanding training opportunities, fostering leadership development, and addressing critical workforce shortages.

One of this year's standout achievements was the statewide **Community Paramedicine/Mobile Integrated Healthcare (CP/MIH) Bootcamp**, made possible through financial backing from SCORH and the coordination expertise of the SC EMS Association, which played a pivotal role in strengthening rural EMS and CP services. **15 rural paramedics** were educated on the Community Paramedicine model, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to enhance patient care within their communities.

Recognizing the importance of leadership development, SCORH supported **10 EMTs** by providing funding to participate in a **Leadership 1 course** by SC EMS Association, focusing on responsibility, decision-making, and management. Through weekly discussions and activities, participants strengthened both individual skills and overall EMS team effectiveness.

Workforce shortages remain a pressing challenge for rural EMS, making recruitment and retention a priority. In response, SCORH collaborated with the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) School of Medicine to provide tuition assistance for **20 EMTs** across **8 rural counties**. By supporting new and advancing EMTs, the program ensured that critical emergency care remains accessible to rural communities in need.



RURAL PARAMEDICS
TRAINED



EMTs FUNDED FOR
LEADERSHIP TRAINING



EMTs RECEIVED
TUITION ASSISTANCE



RURAL COUNTIES
BENEFITED

Advancing Rural Practices

SCORH awarded **39** rural organizations with up to **\$5,000** to advance their practices through modern technology updates, including computers, information technology (IT) updates, educational materials, training, and/or portable medical devices which included fetal dopplers, ECG digital machines, home blood pressure monitors, and more. This funding through partnership with the SC Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare also supported educational conferences, such as National Association of Rural Health Clinics conference and funding for Patient Center Medical Home status.

Choose Well

Choose Well is the Southeast's largest contraceptive access initiative, aiming to reduce unintended pregnancies in South Carolina by providing contraceptive care for women in low income and rural areas. SCORH helps rural providers offer FDA-approved contraceptive methods by allowing the patient to choose the best method for themselves, as well as offering training, and educational resources.

In 2024, SCORH Choose Well Sites:

1

Screened **12,745** women and men for pregnancy intention.

Provided **9,403** women and men with contraceptive counseling.

2

3

Provided **636** devices, **400** of which were long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs).

Driving Innovation, Improving Care, and Empowering Practices

In 2024, SCORH's Center for Practice Transformation (C4PT) collaborated with the South Carolina Department of Public Health (SC DPH) and other key partners to provide **direct practice facilitation, learning opportunities, and technical assistance**. The team supported healthcare practices in optimizing electronic health records (EHRs), redesigning workflows, integrating new team members (such as clinical pharmacists and care managers), strengthening community linkages, and improving data-driven decision-making.

Through the following initiatives, C4PT **empowered practices to enhance cancer care, chronic disease management, and preventive services**—particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Oral Health Advancements

- Partnered with CareQuest OPEN & the National Rural Oral Health Initiative to **improve oral health access**.
- Worked with SC DHHS & Oral Health Division to **enhance medical-dental integration**.
- Presented at NOSORH & NRHA conferences to **share innovative strategies**.

Chronic Disease & Women's Health

- Supported WiseWoman Program to **expand cardiovascular care for underinsured women**.
- **Integrated** a clinical pharmacist to **improve chronic disease management**.

Strengthening Rural Healthcare

- Assisted **100+ practices** with PCMH recognition & value-based transformation.
- Led health equity initiatives to **enhance data-driven disparities reduction**.

25

ACTIVE
PARTICIPANTS

INCREASE

8.5%

IN BREAST
CANCER
SCREENINGS

INCREASE

4.7%

IN CERVICAL
CANCER
SCREENINGS

10

QUALITY
IMPROVEMENT
INTERVENTION
PRACTICES

Expanding Access & Improving Cancer Care

C4PT partnered with the SC DPH Cancer Division to **enhance cancer prevention, early detection, and survivorship care**. Through practice facilitation, technical assistance, and learning collaboratives, the team helped primary care providers improve breast and cervical cancer screenings and implement survivorship care plans, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Best Chance Network

C4PT worked with primary care teams to **strengthen** South Carolina's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. By optimizing EHRs, facilitating quality improvement strategies, and fostering community linkages, we empowered providers to enhance cancer screening efforts and meet quality benchmarks.

Comprehensive Cancer Program

Through the Cancer Survivorship EHR Enhancement Pilot Project, C4PT partnered with SC Comprehensive Cancer Control to support rural practices, ensuring **209 patients** received complete survivorship care plans.

Provider & Patient Impact

Healthcare providers reported significant improvements in cancer care delivery, citing increased awareness, stronger oncology partnerships, and improved long-term care for cancer survivors.

One provider noted:

"The Cancer Survivorship initiative has allowed us to offer more comprehensive and systematic care to our cancer survivor patients, addressing both physical and psychosocial needs."

— Dr. Reshma Khan, Shifa Free Clinic

SCORH's C4PT remains committed to expanding access, optimizing care, and strengthening cancer prevention efforts across South Carolina.

Breaking Barriers, Building Compassion

In 2024, SCORH's Behavioral Health team made significant strides in addressing behavioral health challenges through innovative programs that foster empathy, education, and action. By **engaging communities** in immersive experiences and open conversations, SCORH worked to **combat stigma and build stronger support systems** for individuals facing substance use and mental health disorders.



**EMPATHY
IN ACTION:**
a walk in our shoes

Empathy in Action: a walk in our shoes

One of the most impactful initiatives of the year was the “Empathy in Action” simulation series, held in Columbia, Oconee, Spartanburg, and Georgetown.

A total of **246** participants stepped into the shoes of individuals navigating the complex realities of substance use and mental health challenges. The results were profound—**88%** of surveyed attendees reported **increased empathy**, while **89%** gained a **deeper understanding** of the barriers people face when seeking help.



Participants described the experience as eye-opening, with one noting, “**I was truly taken out of my comfort zone. I’ve gained more empathy not only for patients but also for the providers who support them.**” This hands-on approach proved to be a powerful tool in shifting perspectives and inspiring change.



Community Conversations on Opioid Use Disorder (CCOUD)

SCORH also facilitated **critical conversations around opioid use disorder**, partnering with local organizations to educate and empower communities. Through workshops and training sessions, the initiative engaged **63 participants** in 2024 alone, with **37 individuals** trained to lead future discussions. These efforts ensured that communities have the knowledge and resources to address substance use disorder and support recovery.

Resilient Upstate: Strengthening Behavioral Health Collaboration

The Resilient Upstate Behavioral Health Collaborative is a united effort to enhance behavioral health support across Upstate South Carolina. Led by SCORH, SC DPH, and Ten at the Top, **this initiative brings together organizations to share expertise, tackle challenges, and drive impactful change.**



In 2024, the collaborative developed working groups around four primary areas of focus including:

1. Behavioral Health Systems
2. Behavioral Health Stigma
3. Behavioral Health Professional Pipeline
4. Business and Behavioral Health Linkages

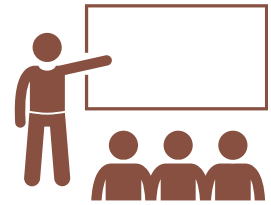
Looking Ahead: A Unified Effort for Lasting Change

Through **immersive education and open dialogue**, SCORH is driving real change in South Carolina's approach to behavioral health. By continuing to engage and empower communities, we are building a future where **empathy leads to action—and action leads to impact.**

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

13

**Presentations & encounters
across 17 South Carolina
Family Medicine Residency
Programs**



**Healthcare sites offered technical
assistance to enhance recruitment
& retention efforts**

25

211

**Impressions with family
medicine residents**



**3RNET new employers
increase on jobs platform**

12%

416

**Unique individuals
referred to rural jobs**



Paving the Way for Recovery - Ready Workplaces

In 2024, the **DREAMS Project**, funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission, advanced recovery-ready workplaces in South Carolina by uniting communities and linking individuals in recovery to supportive jobs.

Community-Led Solutions

A steering committee was established to guide the DREAMS Project and included representatives from SC Vocational Rehabilitation, Veterans Affairs, staffing agencies, local alcohol and drug commissions, mental health centers, the United Way, and more. Their collective expertise shaped the program's direction and ensured its relevance.

Engaging Businesses and Communities

The DREAMS team hosted focus groups, bringing together business leaders to discuss practical strategies for supporting individuals in recovery. Three community conversations provided a platform for individuals in recovery to share their experiences and offer insights into overcoming employment challenges. These efforts engaged a total of 19 businesses and dozens of individuals, generating actionable ideas to support recovery-ready workplace initiatives.

Building Sustainable Support

To address resource gaps, the DREAMS Project established the Career Advisory Council, a subcommittee tasked with assessing community needs, coordinating resources, and developing a comprehensive county resource guide. This initiative aims to create long-term support systems for both employers and employees.

Looking to the Future

The DREAMS Project has laid the groundwork for a future where recovery-ready workplaces are the norm. By aligning resources, fostering collaboration, and empowering communities, the project is transforming the landscape of employment for individuals in recovery—one workplace at a time.

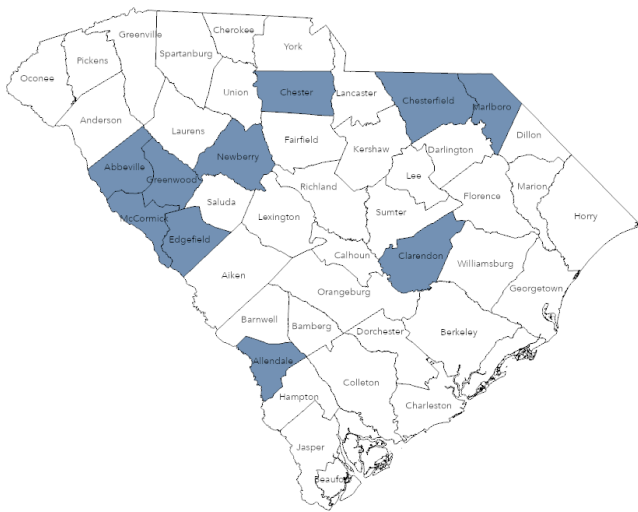
Expanding Capacity Through Coalitions

In 2024, SCORH's Community Health Transformation team (CHT) engaged in projects across the state to build the capacity of local coalitions, helping to transform community health at a local level.

Coalition Development Project

Blueprint for Health, funded by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of SC Foundation, has a mission to solve root causes of poor health, and to build capacity at the local level to solve community health issues. In 2024, **10** community coalitions began implementation of action plans established in 2023 complete with more than **40** policy, systems, and environmental change strategies to improve community health and wellbeing in their county.

Counties with coalitions
engaged in this work



Among these strategies were some innovative and highly successful endeavors including **a local housing summit, the development of a pilot transportation initiative, and growing fresh food distribution sites.** Throughout 2024, more than **\$140,000** was spent on these strategies. Coalition members were also invited to participate in several training opportunities, including **leadership development and skill building for partnerships.**

Looking to the Future

Phase 4 of Blueprint for Health, in partnership with Wholespire, builds on the progress made by expanding coalition development, technical assistance, and community-driven projects. Moving forward, SCORH will continue working with **10 rural coalitions** to address county-specific disparities through a structured process that includes baseline analysis, action planning using Results-Based Accountability (Turn the Curve), fiscal participatory budgeting, and ongoing evaluation. Coalitions will receive sustained support through 2025, with six-month progress reports guiding adjustments and reinforcing long-term impact.

CDC HEAL Project

The CDC's Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) contract, managed by the SC DPH, enables SCORH to provide ongoing support to 13 former Blueprint communities. Nine coalitions received \$50,000 each to implement policy, systems, and environmental changes promoting healthier lifestyles. Community feedback on the CDC HEAL Grant was gathered through CARE interviews with key stakeholders.

Notably, the document produced the following:

"The SCORH team has played a crucial role in supporting rural communities by providing technical assistance, training, and resource connections. This support has been instrumental in driving progress and promoting sustainability within local coalitions."

In **2024**, SCORH **expanded strategic efforts and funding**, adding four new coalitions alongside the original nine grant recipients.



Connecting Care Communities

Rural Health Networks

Rural health networks unite three or more providers and stakeholders **to improve access, coordination, and quality of care while strengthening rural healthcare systems**. Members include a cross-sector of entities, such as hospitals, clinics, behavioral health organizations, and universities.

SCORH offers support to **three** networks:

- **Northeastern Rural Health Network** (Chesterfield, Dillon, Marlboro counties)
- **Tri-County Health Network** (Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg counties)
- **Upper Midlands Rural Health Network** (Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster counties)

Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas (HPHC)

Launched in 2017 by The Duke Endowment and SC Hospital Association, HPHC aims to **reduce obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease** through collective impact strategies.

In **2024**, HPHC achieved the following milestones:

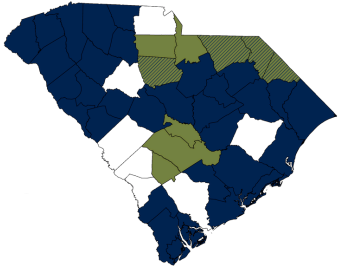
- **Expanded** to **27** SC counties with cohort **3** coalitions
- **Impacted** **1,873,186** people since inception
- **Reached** **151,655** individuals through PSE (policy, system, and environmental) changes and health interventions
- **Onboarded** **seven** new coalitions in Allendale, Cherokee, Clarendon, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, and Union counties

Through these initiatives, SCORH continues to **drive health improvements, strengthen networks, and foster sustainability** in rural communities across South Carolina.



ACCESSHEALTH 2024 OUTCOMES

37
COUNTIES
SERVED



28
FOCUS COUNTIES



67%

PHYSICIANS PARTICIPATING IN
NETWORK SERVICE AREAS



**\$139.4 MILLION
VALUE IN
CARE PROVIDED**

**ENROLLED
6,281
NEW PATIENTS**

**\$50.3 MILLION
HOSPITAL
COSTS AVOIDED**

ACCESSHEALTH

AccessHealth, supported by The Duke Endowment, builds community-based networks to **reduce health disparities, improve outcomes, and lower avoidable hospital use**. SCORH and the SC Hospital Association provide technical assistance in capacity building, data reporting, leadership, sustainability, and funding diversification. AccessHealth networks serve **27,577** enrollees across SC, improving population health indicators.

Technical assistance delivered by SCORH supports AccessHealth networks by:



Partnering with USC's Center for Applied Research and Evaluation to integrate patient feedback



Supporting sustainability through community health initiatives



Capturing the role of CHWs in patient education, case management, and social drivers of health (SDOH) screenings

Strengthening Rural Skillsets

Grant Writing

Between **2023 and 2024**, SCORH, in partnership with Global Partners for Fathers and Families Consulting, LLC and funded by the Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare, hosted **four** grant writing workshops across South Carolina. **Participants engaged in hands-on training, culminating in a grant writing simulation with written feedback.** The top two proposals from each workshop received **\$1,000** awards.

Key Outcomes:

- **205** participants trained from all **46** SC counties
- **44** grant proposals submitted and scored with feedback
- **8** simulation awards of **\$1,000** granted at **4** workshops
- **50%** of surveyed participants sought additional funding post-training
- **40%** of those who applied were awarded funding using skills learned

In **2025**, SCORH will expand these efforts with additional Grant Writing 101 & 102 workshops and quarterly virtual office hours for continued support.

Results - Based Accountability (RBA)

SCORH, in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier SC and funded by The Duke Endowment, developed online RBA training modules, followed by in-person workshops to strengthen statewide collaboration.

Training Reach:

- **203** participants completed online training; **208** more registered for future training
- **93** participants trained in workshops; **73** more registered for future workshops
- Representation from **28** counties online and **18** counties in workshops

Participants praised the training for increasing confidence in applying RBA principles. These efforts are part of a broader initiative to **drive measurable improvements and enhance community collaboration** across South Carolina.

Moving Rural Forward

In 2024, Rural Forward SC continued to drive progress by fostering collaboration and investing in solutions that strengthen South Carolina's rural communities.



Addressing Rural Housing Needs

SCORH gathered multisector partners to discuss rural housing challenges. An initial stakeholder session led to a survey, and a follow-up session with participants who **identified key resources needed to improve rural housing**. SCORH plans to pursue a statewide convening to provide unified strategies and materials for stakeholders.

Strengthening Rural Grocery Access

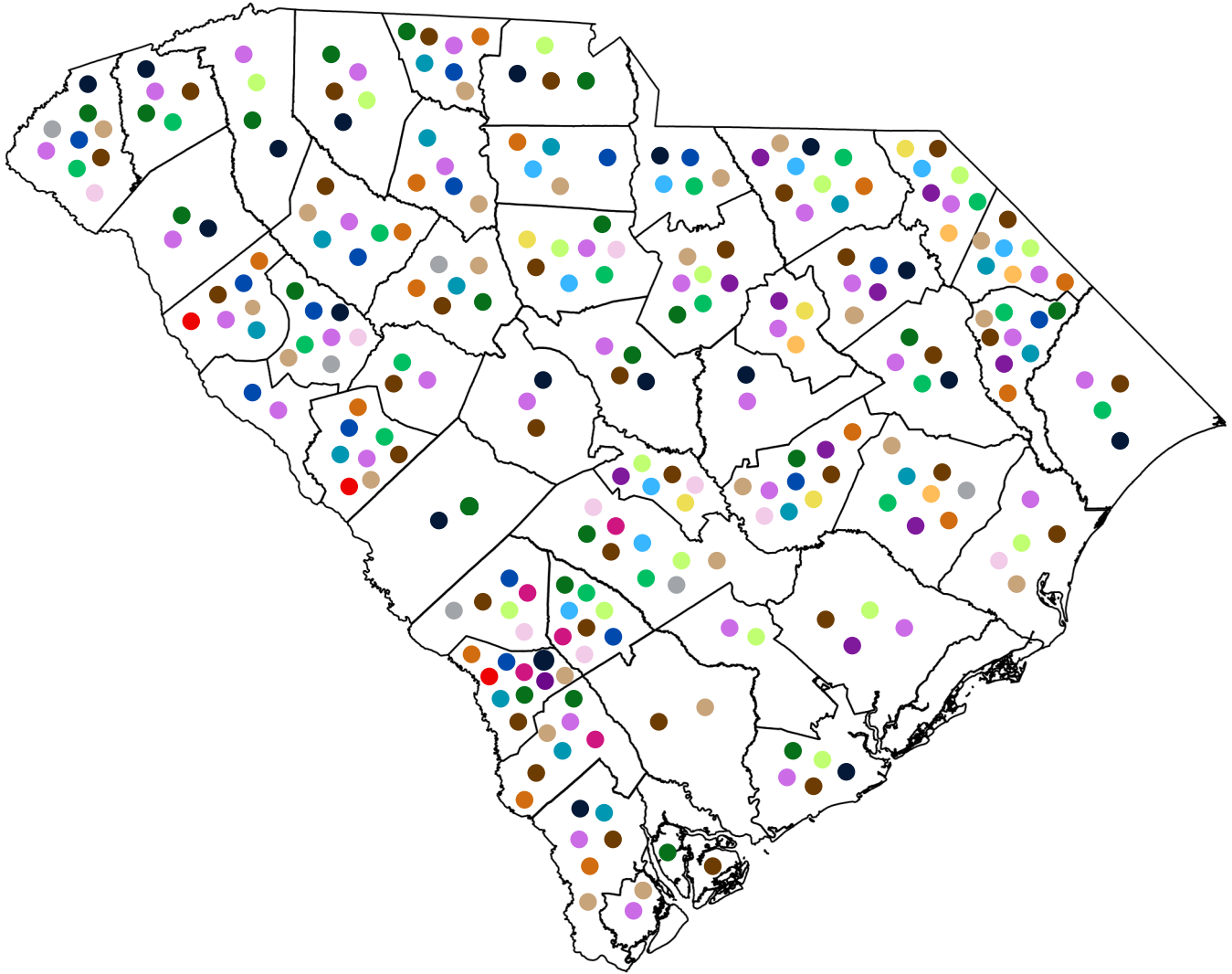
Keeping rural grocery stores open is essential for food access and local economies. As of **December 2024**, SCORH has an in-house **certified rural grocery store transition specialist**, providing expert guidance in financial planning and sustainability to **help rural stores remain viable**.



Expanding Digital Equity

Broadband access is critical for rural South Carolina. SCORH's two-year appointment to the Broadband Advisory Council ensures rural voices are heard in statewide digital initiatives. This year, SCORH participated in multiple council meetings, building on its work with the Digital Economy Ecosystem and Digital Equity Collaborative to **expand internet access**.

SCORH'S IMPACT ACROSS SC



SCORH Programs & Initiatives:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Family Solutions | ● EMT Tuition Assistance Programs |
| ● AccessHealth | ● Rural Hospitals |
| ● Rural Health Network | ● Critical Access Hospitals |
| ● Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas | ● Rural Health Clinics |
| ● Blueprint for Health | ● Digital Economy Ecosystem Improvements |
| ● Building Resilient and Inclusive Communities (BRIC) | ● Small Rural Hospital Improvement Sites |
| ● Choose Well Sites | ● Center for Practice Transformation Assistance |
| ● Community Paramedicine Development Programs | ● SCORH Behavioral Health Initiatives |
| ● State Advocacy Support | ● Workforce Initiatives |

** Dots on map represent a presence of SCORH projects or involvement within that county. **

Advocating for Rural

SCORH is proud to advocate for rural both in South Carolina and nationwide. Our team actively engages in national conversations through staff conference speaking engagements, board representation at the highest levels, and participation in the NRHA Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. By bringing South Carolina's rural priorities to the forefront, we help shape policies that support thriving rural communities.



Shannon Chambers, Senior Director of Provider Solutions, serves as the President for the National Association of Rural Health Clinics (NARHC).

Jessica Seel, Director of Behavioral Health Initiatives & Workforce Development serves as the President for 3RNET (National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network).



SCORH staff attended the 2025 NRHA Policy Institute in Washington, DC. They also visited with South Carolina Members of Congress and staff to discuss the importance of rural health.

In 2024, SCORH staff actively engaged in discussions on rural health by speaking at various meetings and conferences. They shared insights on healthcare challenges, innovative solutions, and policy updates to improve access and outcomes in rural communities. Through these engagements, SCORH continued to foster collaboration for improved healthcare initiatives across the state.



SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF
RURAL HEALTH

Investment. Opportunity. Health.

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@scruralhealth

#PowerofRural #GoodforRural #RuralForwardSC



Save the Date

SC's 28th Annual Rural Health Conference
November 4-6, 2025 | Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island