



Rural Health Association of Tennessee's 32nd Annual Conference
Transforming Rural Health: Aligning People, Policy, and Practice
Marriott Knoxville Downtown | Knoxville, Tennessee

The following individuals and organizations have been selected to present at the 32nd Annual Conference. The speakers, topics, and presentation dates and times are subject to change. All times are Eastern Standard Time.

Pre-Conference: Wednesday, November 18th, 2026 | 7:30 a.m. – Pre-Conference Check-In Opens

Times	Session	Speakers
8:00am - 11:00am	Coordinated School Health	To Be Announced
8:00am - 11:00am	Rural Health Clinics	Kate Hill, RN VP, Clinic Services Division The Compliance Team Jamela Hillary-Harris Senior Provider Relations Representative Palmetto GBA Q&A Roundtable: Ask the Experts
10:00am - 11:00am	Invitation-Only Hospital Executive Meet & Greet with Jeremiah "JJ" J. Hodshire	
11:00am - 11:30am	Registration, Exhibitor Visits & Lunch Service Begins	

Conference Tracks: Room assignments will be announced prior to conference

Room	Track Name
To Be Announced	Childhood Health
To Be Announced	Healthcare Delivery & Innovation
To Be Announced	Healthcare Workforce
To Be Announced	Rural Health Safety Net
To Be Announced	Health Promotion



Conference Agenda: Wednesday, November 18th, 2026

November 18th	Session	Speakers
11:30am - 12:30pm	Opening Welcome, Member Meeting & Luncheon	Dr. Beth Fox, Board President Jacy Warrell, CEO Rural Health Association of Tennessee
12:30pm - 12:45pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
12:45pm - 1:45pm	Opening Plenary Session Rural Health Sustainability through Unapologetic Advocacy	Jeremiah (JJ) J. Hodshire President & Chief Executive Officer Hillsdale Hospital
1:45pm - 2:00pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
2:00pm - 3:00pm	Breakout Session 1	
<i>Childhood Health</i>	The Transformative Power of a Tiny Seed: Cultivating Growth, Clarity & Connection	Sara Rubens, Owner Seed to Sanctuary
<i>Healthcare Delivery & Innovation</i>	When Resources Meet Real Life: Tennessee Community Compass in Action	Moderators: Jaimie Riccitelli, MPS, Community Engagement Director & Wendy Stewart, BA, CRS-A/D, Lead Community Engagement Specialist Rural Health Association of Tennessee Panelists: David Johnson, Community Services Director & David Sikes, Deputy Executive Director SETHRA Martha Dixon, Community Services Manager UETHDA



<i>Healthcare Workforce</i>	2026 Human Resources Year in Review & Trends to Watch in 2027	Joel Cullum, Senior Vice President SESCO Management Consultants
<i>Rural Health Safety Net</i>	Capacity and Consent in Court: Understanding Decision-Making in Vulnerable Adults	Raymond Romano, PhD, MPH, FNP-BC Nurse Practitioner Vanderbilt Memory & Alzheimer's Center
<i>Health Promotion</i>	No Longer Hidden in Plain Sight! A Problem-Based Learning Activity on Drug Prevention and Rural Planning Strategies	Simpfronia Taylor, Ed.D., Director, Community Grants and Programs University of Tennessee Martin, Ripley Center
3:00pm - 3:15pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
3:15pm - 4:15pm	Breakout Session 2	
<i>Childhood Health</i>	Beyond the Puff: Tiered Supports to Strengthen Tobacco & Vaping Interventions	Nathan Wray, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Jenny Wright, Community in Schools Program Manager Oakdale School Patricia Pace, Assistant Director of School & Coordinated School Health Director Morgan County Schools
<i>Healthcare Delivery & Innovation</i>	From Data to Action: Using Population Health Analytics to Transform Rural Healthcare in Tennessee	Satya Surbhi, PhD Associate Professor, College of Medicine, Co-lead Evaluation Core TN Rural Health Care Center of Excellence, University of Tennessee Health Science Center
<i>Healthcare Workforce</i>	Strengthening Succession Planning	Jennifer Sanchez, Director of Business & Grants Management Tennessee Department of Health



<i>Rural Health Safety Net</i>	Nourish Recovery: A Trauma-Informed Nutrition Pilot for Rural Recovery Settings	Kristin Riggsbee, PhD, RDN/LDN, Assistant Professor, Nutrition and Food Safety Specialist University of Tennessee Extension
<i>Health Promotion</i>	Expanding Access, Saving Costs: A Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Medicaid Family Planning Waiver in Tennessee	Wondosen Samuel, PhD, Research Assistant Professor East Tennessee State University Dr. Amal Khoury, Professor and Chair, Department of Health Services Management and Policy East Tennessee State University

Conference Agenda: Thursday, November 19th, 2026

November 19th	Session	Speakers
7:45am - 8:30am	Breakfast Outside Main Ballroom	
8:30am - 9:30am	Morning Plenary Session From Impossible to Inevitable: Leading Innovation in Rural Health Through Evidence, Advocacy, and Collaboration	Rikki Harris, MAMFC, MACE, PhD (ABD), CEO TN Voices Ambassador, Americans for Ibogaine
9:30am - 9:45am	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
9:45am - 10:45am	Breakout Session 3	
<i>Childhood Health</i>	Providing Students Hope & Healing: The BEST Way	Sharon Wheeler, B.E.S.T. Groups Coordinator Monroe County Juvenile Services Kasey Moses, School Counselor Monroe County School System
<i>Healthcare Delivery & Innovation</i>	Evaluating Clinical Artificial Intelligence at Multiple Rural Hospitals in a Single Network	Katherine Brown, PhD, Postdoctoral Research Fellow Vanderbilt University Medical Center

<i>Healthcare Workforce</i>	Shift Script: Mindset Tools That Reduce Burnout and Strengthen Rural Health Teams	Nicole Phillips, Founder Kindness is Contagious, LLC
<i>Rural Health Safety Net</i>	From Vulnerability to Prevention: Understanding Human Trafficking	Sarah McKinnis, CEO & Co-Founder WillowBend Farms, Inc.
<i>Health Promotion</i>	Voices for a Safer Tennessee (Safer TN): Advancing Firearm Safety Through Community Action	Nycole Gentry, East Tennessee Coalition Coordinator Voices for a Safer Tennessee (Safer TN) S. Dave Bhattacharya, MD, Pediatric Trauma Medical Director Erlanger Children's Hospital
10:45am - 11:00am	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
11:00am - 12:00pm	Breakout Session 4	
<i>Childhood Health</i>	To Be Announced	
<i>Healthcare Delivery & Innovation</i>	From Friction to Flow: Reimagining Workflows in Primary Care and Other Outpatient Settings Without the Stress	Cassie Beesley, CRHCP Owner and CEO EmpowerRural Health Solutions, LLC
<i>Healthcare Workforce</i>	Thinking Outside the Pipeline: Creating Authentic Healthcare Career Experiences in Rural Tennessee	Sarah Kane, Community Engagement Manager Tennessee Center for Health Workforce Development Amy Dunaway, Executive Director Blount Memorial Foundation
<i>Rural Health Safety Net</i>	Meeting Rural Communities Where They Are: The McMinn County Area Resource Van	Joe Guy, BS, POST, EMT McMinn County Sheriff's Office Sara Kite, Extension Agent III UT Extension McMinn County

<i>Health Promotion</i>	Hot Topics in Public Health: Emerging Health Trends	Representatives from Tennessee Department of Health Christine Thomas, DO, MPH, Medical Director for HIV, STI, Viral Hepatitis, and TB Programs Caitlin Newhouse, MD, MPH, Medical Director, Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Immunization Program Melissa Dulcey, DVM, PhD, DACVPM, State Public Health Veterinarian and Assistant Director for the Waterborne and Zoonotic Disease Program
12:00pm - 12:45pm	Awards Luncheon & Networking	
12:45pm - 1:15pm	Presentation of Poster Contest Winners & Awards	Dr. Rick Wallace RHA Conference Committee RHA Board Members/Staff
1:15pm - 1:30pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
1:30pm - 2:15pm	Afternoon Plenary Updates from the Tennessee Department of Health	John Dunn, DVM, PhD Commissioner Tennessee Department of Health
2:15pm - 2:30pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
2:30pm - 3:30pm	Breakout Session 5	
<i>Childhood Health</i>	HOPE 101 (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences)	Tabatha Floyd, BS, CPS II, Program Coordinator, HOPE Champion & Andria Crowley, Administrative Assistant I Centerstone
<i>Healthcare Delivery & Innovation</i>	Meeting Community Needs: A Rural Health Access Success Story	Ellen Pruitt, Marketing/Human Resources Manager Hometown Health Clinic



<i>Healthcare Workforce</i>	Staff Wellness: Supporting Our School Staff	Heather Ledbetter, Ed.D., PH, Coordinated School Health Coordinator Maryville City Schools
<i>Rural Health Safety Net</i>	911 as a Rural Access Strategy to Enable Public Pathways to Patient-Centered Care	Janel Paulk, DBA, MBA Assistant Professor East Tennessee State University
<i>Health Promotion</i>	Tennessee's Livability Indicators Dashboard: A County-Level Health Data Resource	John W. Vick, Ph.D., Director Office of Primary Prevention Tennessee Department of Health
3:30pm - 3:45pm	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
3:45pm - 4:45pm	Featured Panel Rural Health Transformation Fund in Tennessee	Panelists to Be Announced
4:45pm	Silent Auction Closes Must Be Present to Win	

Conference Agenda: Friday, November 20th, 2026

November 20th	Session	Speakers
7:45am - 8:30am	Breakfast Outside Main Ballroom	
8:30am - 9:30am	Morning Plenary Growing the Rural Health Workforce: Talent Pipelines that Work for Every Community	Deniece Thomas, Deputy Commissioner Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
9:30am - 9:45am	Break & Exhibitor Visits	
9:45am - 10:45am	Closing Plenary Funding Rural Health: Insights from Grantmakers	State Funding Perspective Amanda Ables, MPA Director of Healthcare Partnerships Tennessee Department of Health



		Regional Funding Perspective Jillian White Appalachian Regional Commission State Program Manager Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Federal Funding Perspective Maribel Nunez Public Health Analyst Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, HRSA
10:45am - 11:00am	Closing Remarks, Door Prizes & Conference Adjournment	

Conference Registration Information:

Registration is now open, and we look forward to welcoming attendees from across Tennessee and beyond to Knoxville for this year's conference, November 18-20, 2026. This event brings together rural health leaders, providers, partners, and advocates to learn, network, and share ideas that support rural communities across the state.

If you have any special needs or accommodation requests, please let us know and we will make every reasonable effort to meet them. Registration cancellations received before October 1 will be eligible for a 75% refund. Cancellations received between October 2nd and October 31st will be eligible for a 50% refund. No refunds will be issued for cancellations received after November 1st.

Lodging

We invite all conference attendees to join us at the Marriott Knoxville Downtown, where a special lodging rate of \$189 per night is available for our event. Attendees are encouraged to book early to secure their rooms. The last day to book at the group rate is Monday, October 26, 2026. **Book your room here.**



Submit an Award Nomination

Each year, the Rural Health Association of Tennessee recognizes individuals and organizations from across the state who have demonstrated outstanding dedication, leadership and service within the field of rural healthcare. These awards highlight the meaningful work being done to improve access to care, strengthen communities and advance the health and well-being of rural Tennesseans.

We encourage you to help us recognize those making a difference by submitting a nomination for one of this year's awards. Award recipients will be recognized during the 2026 RHA Conference.

The deadline for award submissions is Wednesday, September 30, 2026. [Nominate here.](#)

Submit a Poster

RHA's Annual Academic Poster Competition features research conducted by students, academic professionals, and community leaders. Division winners and the overall winner will receive a modest gift certificate.

Winners will be announced during the 32nd Annual Conference Awards Luncheon on National Rural Health Day.

(Winners are not required to be present to win).

Submission Deadline: Friday, October 16, 2026 (No late entrants will be accepted). [Submit here.](#)