Alabama Rural Health Annual Conference
March 18-20, 2026 | Embassy Suites | Hoover, AL

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Student Pre-Conference Sessions (open to all attendees)

2:30 – 4:30 PM   **QPR Training**
This QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training provides participants with practical skills to recognize warning signs of suicide and respond effectively in moments of crisis. The session teaches how to ask direct questions, persuade individuals to seek help, and refer them to appropriate resources with confidence and compassion. Attendees will gain a better understanding of risk factors, protective factors, and how to intervene early to save lives. This training empowers participants to act as proactive gatekeepers and strengthen mental health support within their communities and workplaces.

4:30 – 5:30 PM   **Telehealth Hands-On Exposure**
This interactive session will place participants inside a fully equipped mobile telehealth unit to experience real-world virtual care delivery firsthand. Attendees will explore clinical workflows, connected diagnostic tools, and secure technology platforms used to provide remote care in rural and underserved settings. Facilitators will demonstrate practical use cases and discuss operational considerations, challenges, and opportunities for deploying mobile telehealth solutions in diverse communities.

5:30 PM   **Adjourn Day 1**

Vendor Setup from noon – 8 p.m.

Thursday, March 19, 2026

8:00 AM	Breakfast / Vendor Networking / Conference Check-In

9:00 AM

Maternal Health Resources and Chronic Disease Prevention
Speaker: Annie Jones, LMSW
This session explores strategies to expand access to maternal health services for pregnant women and new mothers before, during, and after pregnancy in rural Alabama, with a focus on outreach, education, transportation support, and community-based care models such as doulas and community health workers. It also examines approaches to preventing, treating, and managing chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease through community education, coordinated services, transportation assistance, and trusted local health workers. Together, these efforts highlight how rural hospitals, clinics, and community partnerships can improve access to care and strengthen long-term maternal and chronic disease outcomes in rural communities.

10:00 AM

Crafting Solutions and Community Building for Maternal Care
Speakers: Holly Horan, PhD, Janise Norman, Jamilah Channel, Ashely Steiner, Andrea Hayes, Tamela Hughes
This session will highlight a regional, community-driven approach to improving access to maternity care in predominantly rural areas facing significant service gaps. Participants will learn how families, community leaders, and health professionals can come together across sectors to identify sustainable and scalable strategies that address maternity care deserts and areas with limited access. Through an interactive, case-based discussion, the session will demonstrate practical methods for building collaboration, strengthening community networks, and laying the groundwork for improved maternal care access in rural communities.

11:00 AM

Aligning Community Resources with the Needs of Families: AL-MOMS
Speakers: Elizabeth Muñoz, DNP, CNM, FACNM;
Candace Knight, RN, BSN, PhD
This session highlights Alabama's AL-MOMS initiative and its multi-disciplinary approach to improving maternal outcomes. Participants will learn how healthcare providers, social services, and community partners collaborate to address gaps in maternal care. The presentation emphasizes coordination, access, and improved outcomes for mothers and families statewide.

Noon

Lunch/ Annual Business Meeting
This session is the annual business meeting for the Alabama Rural Health Association. All conference members, attendees and vendors are welcome to participate.

12:45 PM	**Panel Discussion: Navigating the Rural Emergency Hospital Model: Revenue Sustainability and Community-Centered Care**
	Panelists: Dr. Irfan Asif, Dr. Bill Curry, and Dewayne Bailey
	This session explores the transition from traditional rural hospital operations to the Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) model, with a focus on maintaining financial stability while meeting the healthcare needs of rural communities. Participants will examine key revenue considerations, including Medicare payment structures, service line redesign, and strategies to offset the loss of inpatient revenue. The presentation will also address how hospitals can thoughtfully realign service delivery to ensure timely emergency care, effective outpatient services, and strong referral partnerships. Attendees will leave with practical insights to support informed decision-making as their organizations evaluate or implement the REH model.
1:30 PM	**Break/ Vendor Discovery**
2:15 PM	**Breakout Sessions**

<u>Breakout 1</u>

Learn the Walk Before You Walk Beside Them: Using a Poverty Simulation to Prepare Medical Students for Rural Clinical Rotations
Speaker: Andrea Gathercole, M.S.
It is essential to train medical students from various social backgrounds on how to approach the complex barriers of social determinants of health (SDOH) and poverty with empathy, understanding, and confidence in developing a plan of care. To investigate effective methods of teaching SDOH, we conducted a research project to statistically evaluate baseline and post-intervention changes in empathy, confidence, and understanding of social determinants of health (SDOH) among 95 osteopathic medical students participating in an in-person CAPS poverty simulation. The findings of this research demonstrate the effectiveness of simulation-based learning in preparing medical students to care for underserved populations and highlight the importance of aligning medical education preparation with initiatives like the Community TEAMS Act (H.R. 3885) to ensure medical students are equipped to address the needs of rural and underserved communities prior to clinical rotations.

<u>Breakout 2</u>

Whose Problem Is It? Equipping Rural Alabama for Suicide Prevention
Speaker: Pam Williams, LMSW
VitAL's Project Zero Suicide is working to bring evidence-based suicide prevention training and implementation of the Zero Suicide care model across the state. The project's efforts prioritize work in the state's most rural counties with the highest identified need. In this session, Zero Suicide team members will guide the learner through discussion of

common barriers to suicide-prevention efforts in rural areas, how these barriers have emerged within the project's work, and available, evidence-based strategies for overcoming them. Attendees will leave the session with an understanding of best practice-level suicide prevention that can be utilized in a variety of settings—from communities to medical offices—situated on a foundation of implementation strategies that are both evidence-based and Alabama-specific.

3:00 PM   **Break**

3:15 PM   <u>Breakout 3</u>

Elevating Revenue Cycle Performance: How Leadership Alignment Drives Cash Collections
Speaker: Amy Graham, MBA, CRHCP
Improving revenue cycle performance and accelerating cash collections requires more than operational fixes, it depends on intentional leadership alignment and cross-functional collaboration. This session explores how engaged leaders and empowered revenue cycle champions drive accountability, efficiency, and measurable financial improvement across rural and community hospitals. Attendees will learn the foundational elements of revenue cycle excellence, how to identify and prioritize the KPIs that matter most, and practical strategies for aligning teams around shared financial goals. Participants will leave with actionable tools and real-world examples that demonstrate how leadership-driven alignment strengthens performance and delivers sustainable cash flow improvements.

<u>Breakout 4</u>

S.E.C.U.R.E. – Safe Emergency Control Understanding and Redirecting the Elderly in Rural Hospital Settings
Speaker: Heidi Smith
This session will provide healthcare professionals with practical strategies for safely managing elderly patients in rural hospital environments, with a focus on individuals living with dementia and other cognitive impairments. The presentation will address common behavioral challenges encountered in acute care settings and outline effective approaches to de escalation, communication, and maintaining patient dignity while ensuring staff safety. Participants will gain insight into assessment techniques, environmental considerations, and care planning decisions, including appropriate placement and transitions of care. The session draws on more than 20 years of specialized experience working with elderly populations in hospital settings.

4:00 PM   **Break**

4:15 PM	**From Documentation to Intelligence: Practical Use Cases for Ambient AI in Healthcare**
	Speaker: Derrick Helms
	This presentation explores how ambient AI is transforming healthcare by reducing clinician documentation burden, improving operational efficiency, and enhancing the patient experience. Attendees will examine real-world use cases such as ambient clinical documentation, early detection of patient deterioration, clinical summarization, and medication safety. The session also outlines a practical "crawl, walk, run" framework showing how organizations evolve from manual data entry to fully integrated ambient care ecosystems. Participants will leave with a clear understanding of how ambient AI delivers measurable clinical, operational, and patient-centered value today.
5:00 PM	**Adjourn Day 2**

Friday, March 20, 2026

7:15 AM	**Breakfast and Check-In**
8:30 AM	**Water Fluoridation: Value Beyond Teeth**
	Speaker: Stephen C. Mitchell, DMD, MS
	Water fluoridation has come under recent scrutiny in the nation for possible health concerns, while the benefits of fluoridation have not been fully explored . In this session, we will review the latest science related to water fluoridation and cognition. Additionally, Alabama fluoridation and tooth decay data will be presented to show the possible health and financial impact removal of water fluoridation could have on our state.
9:30 AM	**Healthcare Outlook for Alabama in 2026**
	Speaker: Scott Harris, MD
	This session will provide a comprehensive overview of the healthcare outlook for the State of Alabama in 2026 and beyond. Dr. Scott Harris, State Health Officer, will discuss emerging public health trends, policy priorities, and system-level challenges influencing access, workforce capacity, and population health outcomes across the state. Attendees will gain insight into anticipated opportunities and strategic considerations shaping Alabama's healthcare landscape in the coming year.
10:15 AM	**Networking Break**

10:45 AM	**Healthcare Panel Discussion**
	Speakers: Emily Marsal, Danne Howard, Mary Finch, moderated by Dave White

Healthcare Panel Discussion Join a panel of healthcare leaders for a timely discussion on the key challenges and opportunities shaping rural health systems today. Emily Marsal brings a state and policy perspective on rural healthcare transformation, strategic planning, and navigating federal and state funding to strengthen access and infrastructure. Danne Howard and Mary Finch will share practical insights on rural hospital and community health center finance, operations, quality improvement, and innovative care delivery models that balance sustainability with community needs. Moderated by Dave White, this session will connect policy, financial strategy, and service delivery while highlighting emerging hot topics such as workforce development, reimbursement changes, and community centered rural care.

Student poster awards

Noon   **Adjourn Day 3**

AHEC Student Conference Agenda
The Student Conference is hosted by the Alabama AHEC Program.

Thursday, March 19, 2026

8:00 am - Sign in/ Registration/Breakfast

9:00 am - Welcome, Speaker introduction

9:30 am - Telehealth (Lloyd Sirmons)

10:15 am – Break

10:30 am – Nutrition & Rural, Healthy/SNAP Programs

11:30 am - Panel Discussion

12:00 – 5:00 pm - Students participate in ARHA Conference sessions

Friday, March 20, 2026
Students are invited to participate in the remaining conference sessions