

Oct. 5–7

AMA Advocacy in Action Workshop



Advocating for Maternal Health: Bolstering Rural Obstetric Emergency Services

Access to timely obstetrical and gynecological care is paramount to ensuring the health of pregnant patients. However, there is a growing maternal health access crisis in rural areas of the country. Since 2005, 109 rural hospitals have closed their doors.¹ In the past 6 years, 146 rural hospitals have closed their labor and delivery (L&D) units, resulting in a 14% reduction.² As of 2023, 60% of rural counties do not have hospital-based obstetric services.³ Furthermore, 40% of rural communities must travel 30 minutes or more to the nearest maternity hospital unit.⁴

This reduction in access to care has caused disparities in healthcare access and outcomes in rural maternity care. Rural patients have a greater risk of pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity than their urban counterparts.⁵ This includes hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP) such as preeclampsia and gestational hypertension, of which those in rural areas are 9% more likely to have than their urban counterparts.⁶ They also have a greater risk of pregnancy-related hospitalizations and ICU admissions.^{7,8} In the postpartum period, rural patients are more likely to experience postpartum depression.⁹ Severity of postpartum depression for these patients can be further exacerbated by mental health access issues such as proximity to care, provider shortages, and lack of insurance.¹⁰ Given such inequities, addressing access to maternal health services is a major public health concern.

What's Driving the Rural Maternity Care Crisis

Factors influencing the rural maternity care crisis include issues of hospital financing, reimbursement for obstetrical services, and workforce shortages. With regard to hospital financing, rural hospitals must staff a functioning L&D unit 24/7. However, rural communities do not have enough deliveries to generate the revenue needed to cover the costs of maintaining an obstetric ward.¹¹ As such, rural hospitals are increasingly closing their L&D units to remain open. Obstetrical services previously followed a global CPT code, meaning that all services provided during the pregnancy were covered under one bundled payment. Recently, CMS incorporated the AMA's suggestion to introduce more granular CPT obstetrical codes in a Proposed Rule. If finalized, this billing change will allow for reimbursement to greater reflect the complexity of care provided during the prenatal period.¹² Maternal health physicians disproportionately practice in urban areas. To address these disparities in access to maternal health providers, federal agencies such as the Human Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant funding for the development of rural OB/GYN training programs as well as support for rural nurse-midwives.¹³

The United States continues to experience high maternal mortality and morbidity rates in comparison to peer nations.¹⁴ Targeting the maternal health outcomes in rural communities is critical to addressing these disparities and ensuring the health and wellbeing of our nation's families.

Legislative Solutions

To address access issues in the rural maternity health crisis, lawmakers have introduced the “Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act” for the 2025-2026 legislative session. This bipartisan bill seeks to address the issue of rural maternal healthcare access by training and equipping rural hospitals that lack L&D units in emergency obstetric care, as well as providing telehealth consultations for specialist obstetric care, such as maternal-fetal medicine physicians and fetal cardiologists. Especially given the unpredictable nature of childbirth, bolstering non-OB hospital services is important in addressing rural maternal health disparities. The bill’s specific aims are to:

- Direct the Health Resources and Services Administration’s (HRSA) Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health to create an obstetric emergency training program for rural health care facilities that do not have a dedicated labor & delivery unit;
- Establish new federal grants for rural health care facilities to purchase necessary equipment to carry out obstetrics readiness training and response;
- Create a pilot program to support a statewide or regional network of obstetric and maternal health care teams that can provide urgent teleconsultation to rural facilities; and
- Direct HHS to study maternity ward closures, regional patterns of patient transport, and models for regional partnerships for rural obstetric care.

The AMA strongly supports this bill, and has written a letter to both the House and the Senate expressing such an opinion. In July of 2026, the Senate version of the bill was passed favorably out of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. On the House side, the bill has been referred to the Energy and Commerce Committee.

- The Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act H.R. 1254/S. 380 was introduced by Reps Kelly (D-IL), Kim (R-CA), Schrier (D-WA), and Meuser (R-PA), as well as Sens. Hassan (D-NH), Collins (R-ME), Britt (R-AL), and Smith (D-MN).

ACTION REQUESTED

Coordinate a sign-on letter for students from your medical school urging your Representatives and Senators to support:

- H.R. 1254/S. 380, the Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act, in order to increase access to critical obstetrical care in rural communities across the nation.

Increase Access to Rural Emergency Obstetric Care

**Contact your representatives to support the Rural
Obstetrics Readiness Act (H.R. 1254/S. 380).**

Endnotes

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6. Natalie A. Cameron, Ian Everitt, Laura E. Seegmiller, Lynn M. Yee, William A. Grobman & Sadiya S. Khan, Trends in the Incidence of New-Onset Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy Among Rural and Urban Areas in the United States, 2007 to 2019, 11 J. Am. Heart Ass'n e023791 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.121.023791>
7. Univ. of Minn. Rural Health Research Ctr., Rural/Urban Differences in Health, Health Care Use, and Barriers to Care for Postpartum and Parenting Women, 2006–2018 (Julia D. Interrante et al., 2025), https://rhrc.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Rural-urban-differences-in-health_postpartum_8.27.25.pdf
8. Katharine A. Harrington, Natalie A. Cameron, Kasen Culler, William A. Grobman & Sadiya S. Khan, Rural–Urban Disparities in Adverse Maternal Outcomes in the United States, 2016–2019, 113 Am. J. Pub. Health 224 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2022.307134>
9. Policy Ctr. for Maternal Mental Health, Maternal Mental Health in Rural Communities, <https://policycentermmh.org/maternal-mental-health-in-rural-communities/>
10. *Id.*
11. Kevin Bennett et al., Why Rural Hospitals Are Facing a Funding Crisis — and How It Could Get Worse, Commonwealth Fund (Feb. 9, 2026), <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/explainer/2026/feb/why-rural-hospitals-face-funding-crisis-how-it-could-get-worse>
12. American Medical Association, CPT® 2027 Maternity Care Services Code Changes, Am. Med. Ass'n (July 8, 2026), <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/cpt/cpt-2027-maternity-care-services-code-changes>
13. Rural Health Information Hub, Rural Maternal Health, Rural Health Information Hub (last updated May 27, 2026), <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/maternal-health>
14. Munira Z. Gunja et al., Insights into the U.S. Maternal Mortality Crisis: An International Comparison, Commonwealth Fund (June 4, 2024), <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2024/jun/insights-us-maternal-mortality-crisis-international-comparison>