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**Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program
Awards UAMS Nearly \$12 Million to Fund 4 Initiatives**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences received nearly \$12 million in funding under the THRIVE and PACT initiatives of the Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP).

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders [announced the awards today](#) with four UAMS programs receiving funding — Virtu-RURAL (Remote Upgrades to Rural Arkansas Locations), Stroke Pathways to Advance Rural Knowledge (SPARK), Specialty Telehealth Access for Rural Communities in Arkansas (STAR), and Arkansas Pregnancy Care Connect. Altogether, UAMS was awarded \$11,991,204 in funding.

“Improving rural healthcare is one of the most significant issues in our state. Where someone lives should not determine the quality of care available to them,” said UAMS Chancellor C. Lowry Barnes, M.D. “I would like to thank Gov. Sarah Sanders for her leadership on this issue and for bringing so many stakeholders to the table to work together to improve healthcare for all Arkansans.”

Arkansas’ Rural Health Transformation Program is designed to support a strong, connected rural health system where families can get the care they need close to home. The program focuses on practical solutions that strengthen local communities, support rural providers, and use targeted investments in technology and partnerships to improve health outcomes through preventive care and healthier lifestyles. The THRIVE initiative stands for Telehealth, Health-monitoring, and Response Innovation for Vital Expansion, while the PACT initiative is for Promoting Access, Coordination, and Transformation.

Led by Roy Kitchen, the executive director of UAMS’ e-Link telemedicine infrastructure program, Virtu-RURAL represents a comprehensive, five-year statewide plan to transform rural healthcare delivery by installing new telehealth capacities and improving digital health knowledge among the state’s nearly 1.3 million rural Arkansans. This program was awarded \$2.3 million in funding.

Johnathan Goree, M.D., the director of UAMS’s chronic pain division, leads SPARK, which will build an integrated, rural-centered stroke pathway across Arkansas, where

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roughly 1.3 million rural residents (45% of the state) face elevated stroke mortality, provider shortages, and fragmented post-stroke support. Led by UAMS in partnership with 63 rural and community hospitals and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies, SPARK will connect rural communities, EMS, emergency departments, and primary care providers in a coordinated system that delivers stroke recognition, acute treatment, recovery support, and secondary prevention close to home. The program was awarded \$5.4 million in funding.

The STAR program will establish Arkansas' first coordinated, community-based specialty hearing care delivery system across 17 rural counties in the Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest regions. Led by Susan D. Emmett, M.D., MPH, director of the UAMS Center for Hearing Health Access, STAR will deploy community-based hearing screening and remote specialist triage within trusted settings, including Cooperative Extension offices, community pharmacies, and rural clinics. STAR will embed virtual specialty hearing services within existing rural clinics, creating local diagnostic and treatment capacity through a cloud-based telehealth platform with regional specialists. The program was awarded \$1.2 million in funding.

Arkansas Pregnancy Care Connect is an integrated maternal access model designed to improve access to women's health, prenatal, and postpartum care across rural Arkansas. The program will deploy mobile clinic teams in two regions and launch a statewide nurse-led pregnancy and postpartum advice line. Led by Nirvana Manning, M.D., chair of the UAMS Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and director of the UAMS Arkansas Center for Women and Infants' Health, the program was awarded \$2.98 million in funding.

"The programs exemplify UAMS's efforts to expand healthcare offerings throughout Arkansas," Barnes said. "These RHTP awards have given us the opportunity to propose programs that will make a real difference in rural areas."

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,553 students and 1,030 medical residents and fellows, and two dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with about 12,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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