

UAMS News Bureau

Office of Communications & Marketing
4301 W. Markham St. # 890
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

news.uams.edu



**News Release
Sept. 24, 2026**

Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Yavonda Chase, 501-686-8994
Wireless phone: 501-416-0354
yavonda@uams.edu

**Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program
Awards UAMS \$5 Million to Fund 6 Initiatives**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) received more than \$5 million in funding under the HEART and RISE ARKANSAS initiatives of the Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP).

[Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced the awards today](#) with six UAMS program receiving funding — Transforming Obstetrical Care in Rural Arkansas—Family Medicine Obstetrics Fellowship, Bridges to Care: Arkansas Rural Behavioral Health Workforce Collaborative, Cultivating Arkansas’ Pathways (CAP) to Nursing Excellence, Certificate in Rural Healthcare Management Program, Food Is Medicine for Rural Cancer Prevention and Care, and Mobile Faith Rural Health Outreach Program (Mobile Faith). Altogether, UAMS was awarded \$5,068,862 in funding.

“Improving healthcare access and quality in rural areas is one of the most pressing issues facing Arkansas today,” said UAMS Chancellor C. Lowry Barnes, M.D. “Every Arkansan deserves access to excellent care, regardless of where they live. I commend and thank Gov. Sarah Sanders for her leadership in advancing healthcare improvements that benefit 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 HEART initiative stands for Healthy Eating, Active Recreation & Transformation while RISE AR is Recruitment, Innovation, Skills, and Education for Arkansas Healthcare.

Led by Shashank Kraleti, M.D., chair of the UAMS Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, the Transforming Obstetrical Care in Rural Arkansas project will create a fellowship training program in Jonesboro to help family medicine doctors learn how to care for patients during pregnancy, childbirth, and after delivery. The program will be based at St. Bernards and will train two doctors each year.

--NEXT--

Isis Martel, M.S., in the UAMS Department of Family and Preventive Medicine's Research and Evaluation Division, will lead Bridges to Care: Arkansas Rural Behavioral Health Workforce Collaborative, which aims to strengthen the skillset of those who provide mental health and substance use support in rural Arkansas. Because rural communities typically lack behavioral health specialists, these services are often provided by family doctors and nurses, school counselors, peer specialists in recovery, court teams, and faith leaders. Bridges to Care will give this workforce free, practical, evidence-based training and ongoing support. Training will be offered in person around the state, live online, and on demand.

Cultivating Arkansas' Pathways (CAP) to Nursing Excellence is a statewide workforce development initiative designed by the UAMS College of Nursing to strengthen the rural nursing workforce by expanding educational pathways from entry into professional nursing through advanced practice preparation. Led by College of Nursing Dean Sarah Rhodes, Ph.D., DNP, CAP will prepare and retain highly qualified nurses to serve Arkansas' rural communities by implementing three strategies: 1) creating an Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (A-BSN) and streamlining the LPN-BSN program to serve eastern, southern, and central Arkansas, and expanding the successful Northwest Arkansas A-BSN program to serve rural NWA; 2) developing structured rural nurse anesthesia, nurse-midwifery, and advanced practice nurse mentorship pathways; and 3) recruiting rural students who will remain in rural areas to practice.

Ann Chou, Ph.D., MPH, professor and chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management in the UAMS Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, will work to create the Certificate in Rural Healthcare Management Program. This 12-month, fully online certificate program is designed for current and aspiring healthcare leaders and will help build a stronger leadership workforce for Arkansas' rural healthcare organizations.

The Food Is Medicine for Rural Cancer Prevention and Care is a farm-to-clinic initiative to reduce food insecurity and improve health outcomes among Arkansans with cancer. Led by Michael Thomsen, Ph.D., a professor in the College of Public Health Department of Health Policy and Management, the project will connect rural patients with locally sourced healthy food prescriptions, clinic and home garden programs, and evidence-based culinary nutrition education. In the first year, the program aims to directly serve at least 500 patients with food prescriptions and pilot garden interventions with up to 210 rural households.

Mobile Faith is a community-based mobile outreach initiative that integrates preventive screening, health education, referral coordination, and chronic disease support through trusted faith-based partnerships and community health workers (CHWs). The program is led by Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., the director of the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation.

"These innovative programs demonstrate the depth of UAMS's commitment to rural healthcare," Barnes said.

Today's announcement is the second round of projects funded by the Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program. In August, UAMS was awarded nearly \$12 million under the THRIVE and PACT initiatives.

This project is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$208,779,396.02, with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS or the U.S. Government.

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](#).

Like us, we're social:

