



How to Become a Rural Health Clinic

The purpose of the Rural Health Clinics program is to encourage and stabilize the provision of outpatient primary care in underserved rural areas through the use of physicians, physician assistants (PAs), nurse practitioners (NPs), and certified nurse midwives (CNMs). The following is an overview of the major requirements clinics must meet in order to become certified as a Rural Health Clinic.

1. Location - Rural Health Clinics must be located in communities that are both "rural" and "underserved". For purposes of the Rural Health Clinics Act, the following definitions apply to these terms:

- **Rural Area** - Census Bureau designation as "Non-urbanized"
- **Shortage Area** - A federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA), a federally designated Medically Underserved Area (MUA), or an Area designation as "underserved" by the state's Governor.

2. Physical Plant

- May be permanent or mobile
- Has a preventive maintenance program
- Has non-medical emergency procedures

3. Staffing

- One or more physicians
- One or more PAs, NPs, or CNMs
- PA, NP, or CNM must be on-site and available to see patients 50% of the time the clinic is open for appointments.

4. Provision of Services - Each Rural Health Clinic must be capable of delivering outpatient primary care services. The Clinic must maintain written patient care policies:

- Developed by a physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner, and one health practitioner who is not a member of the clinic staff
- That describe the services provided directly by the clinic's staff or through arrangement
- That provide guidelines for medical management of health problems
- That provide for annual review of the policies

Direct Services (must be provided by clinic staff)

- Diagnostic and therapeutic services commonly furnished in a physician's office
- Basic laboratory services (6 tests):
 - ✓ Chemical examinations of urine

- ✓ Hemoglobin or Hematocrit
- ✓ Blood sugar
- ✓ Examination of stool specimens for occult blood
- ✓ Pregnancy test
- ✓ Primary culturing for transmittal

Emergency Services

- First response to common life-threatening injuries and acute illnesses
- Has available drugs used commonly in life-saving procedures

Services Provided Through Arrangement (may be provided by individuals other than clinic staff)

- Inpatient hospital care
- Specialized physician services
- Specialized diagnostic and laboratory services
- Interpreter for foreign language, if indicated
- Interpreter for deaf, and devices to assist communication with blind

5. Patient Health Records

- Record system guided by written policies and procedures
- Designated professional staff member responsible for maintaining records
- Records must include the following information:
 - ✓ Identification data
 - ✓ Physician orders
 - ✓ Physical exam findings
 - ✓ Consultative findings
 - ✓ Social data
 - ✓ Diagnostic and laboratory reports
 - ✓ Consent forms
 - ✓ Medical history
 - ✓ Health status assessment
 - ✓ Signatures of the physician or other health care professionals

Protection of Record Information Policies

- Maintenance of confidentiality
- Safeguards against loss, destruction, or unauthorized use
- Written policies and procedures governing use and removal, and release of information
- Written patient consent for release

6. Financial Feasibility

It is important for persons considering the development or establishment of a Rural Health Clinic to ensure that the financial impact or benefits are significant enough to outweigh the cost incurred in establishing a Rural Health Clinic. It is recommended that a financial feasibility analysis be conducted to help determine the financial impact of the RHC program. An example of this analysis is available in the document *Starting a Rural Health Clinic – A How-To Manual*, created by HRSA. This guide is available at <ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/ruralhealth/RHCmanual1.pdf>.

How to File an RHC Application

An RHC Application can be obtained from The Indiana State Department of Health Office of Rural Health. The application consists of two parts:

- The RHC application; and,
- The CMS 855A Provider/Supplier Enrollment application (available at <http://cms.hhs.gov/providers/enrollment/forms>)

The HRSA guide entitled *Starting a Rural Health Clinic – A How-To Manual*, walks through the application process step-by-step.

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