

# South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program

Program Handbook | Updated October 2025



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# South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Overview

## About the Program

To address the maldistribution of behavioral and mental health professionals in rural and underserved areas of South Carolina, the Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program was established via [state budget proviso 23.5](#) in July 2024. This program provides financial incentives to behavioral and mental health professionals who contract to practice in non-urbanized areas of the state for four years.

All recipients must have completed an accredited graduate training program and hold a valid and active license **OR** work for the South Carolina Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (BHDD) Office of Mental Health as a Mental Health Professional (MHP), and be employed full- or half-time in the provision of behavioral or mental health care to patients in a non-urbanized area in South Carolina.

## Specifically, the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program may provide funding in the following amounts:

Provider Type	Practice location	Incentive Amount
Qualified behavioral health professionals (full-time)	Non-urbanized area	\$15,000 per year for up to four years
Qualified behavioral health professionals (part-time)	Non-urbanized area	\$7,500 per year for up to four years

### Notes

- Telehealth providers will be considered if their practice site is located in a qualifying non-urbanized area, and care is provided to patients based in non-urbanized areas within South Carolina.
- Half-time option (minimum of 20 hours per week) for half of the full-time (minimum of 36 hours per week) funding amount may be considered.

\*Please see the [Eligibility](#) section for assistance to determine eligibility of a specific practice address.

## Funding Source

The Legislature of South Carolina provides that the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) is the state agency responsible for administering the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (AHEC) program. The Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program was initiated by the South Carolina Legislature in 2024 via proviso to address the undersupply of behavioral health and mental health professionals in rural and underserved South Carolina communities. The funds for this program are appropriated to MUSC and the program is administered by South Carolina AHEC.

The program provides funding to clinical nurse specialists in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, CNS), nurse practitioners in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, NP), physician assistants in psychiatry/mental health (PA, PA-C), psychiatrists (MD/DO), psychologists (PhD, PsyD), social workers (LMSW, LISW), licensed professional counselors (LPC), marriage and family therapists (LMFT), licensed addiction counselors and mental health professionals (MPH) employed at the South Carolina BHDD Office of Mental Health who contract for a period of four years to practice in non-urbanized areas of South Carolina in an outpatient setting. This program does not connect professionals with employment, applicants must be employed at an eligible site to participate.

## Board

The program is administered by South Carolina AHEC and managed by the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Board, the members of which are defined in the South Carolina Code of Laws. This board meets periodically to vote on applicants and discuss other items of business. The board is composed of the following representatives: the Chief Executive Officer, or his designee, of the South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH); a representative from the South Carolina Primary Care Office of the Department of Public Health (SCDPH); a behavioral health professional; a representative from the South Carolina BHDD Office of Mental Health; and a staff member from the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (SC AHEC). This board serves without compensation.

# Program Details

## Priority

The intent of this program is to support behavioral and mental health professionals in establishing or joining practices in non-urbanized areas of the state. Priority for this program will be given to those practicing in areas of greatest need (most medically underserved). Candidates are prioritized using an objective checklist that awards points for categories such as community need and employment factors.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for this program, all applicants must:

- Have completed an accredited graduate training program and hold a valid and active license **OR** work for the South Carolina BHDD Office of Mental Health as a Mental Health Professional (MHP)
- Work in an eligible profession/role. Providers within these disciplines with associate licenses are also eligible to apply:
  - Clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, CNS)
  - Nurse practitioner in psychiatry/mental health (APRN, NP)
  - Physician assistant in psychiatry/mental health (PA, PA-C)
  - Psychiatrist (MD/DO)
  - Psychologist (PhD, PsyD)
  - Social worker (LMSW, LISW)
  - Licensed professional counselor (LPC)
  - Marriage and family therapist (LMFT)
  - Licensed addiction counselor
  - Mental Health Professional (MHP) employed at the South Carolina BHDD Office of Mental Health
- Provide behavioral/mental health care in an outpatient setting in a **non-urbanized area** (see section below if you are unsure about your practice location's eligibility)
- Work 36 hrs/week to qualify for full-time incentives, 20 hrs/week for part-time incentives
- Be a U.S. citizen
- Must not have an outstanding contractual service obligation to the federal government (i.e., National Health Service Corps), the state government (i.e., Rural Provider Incentive Program), or any other entity
- Cannot previously have received funding from the Rural Provider Incentive Program

## How do I know if I practice in a non-urbanized location?

The Rural Health Information Hub's "Am I Rural?" tool\* can be useful in determining if your practice location is in a non-urbanized area.\*\* To run a self-query, follow the steps below:

1. Navigate to [www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/am-i-rural)
2. Enter your practice location in the text box and click "Locate"
3. Click "Run Report" in the location information on the map next to the address
4. On the results page, scroll down to the "Program Eligibility" section
5. Check the "CMS Rural Health Clinic (RHC) Program" row:
  - a. If it says "Yes" – your practice location is non-urbanized.

- b. If it says, “No” – your practice location is urbanized and not eligible for this program.

\*The “Am I Rural?” tool is a product of the Rural Health Information Hub (RHlhub) and available on their website at [www.ruralhealthinfo.org](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org). It is one of many tools to determine if a location falls under federal definitions for urban/non-urban as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau. If you have concerns about how your practice location is defined, please contact us.

\*\*Practice location eligibility is based on status at the time of application review by the Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program board.

## Application Process

Applications for the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program open in October and are due in March of each year. Precise application dates will be posted on the [program webpage](#) during the application period. Completed applications will be considered by the Board shortly after the application period closes. No late applications will be accepted.

Accepted applicants will be notified if they receive funding in July and more information about contracts will be provided at that time. Emails will be sent to all applicants indicating if they were approved or not approved.

## Steps to Apply

1. Click “Apply” button (only available when application cycle is open) on the [Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program webpage](#) to be routed to the Eligibility Form.
2. Complete the Eligibility Form.
3. If eligible, you will be routed to the full application. If not eligible, please review the [Eligibility](#) section.
4. Please complete the online application in the Submittable portal. You can save as a draft and return to submit when completed.
5. You will receive a confirmation email after submitting your application. **If you do not receive a confirmation email from Submittable within 24 hours, please contact [retention@scahec.net](mailto:retention@scahec.net).**

## Required Documentation

All application materials must be submitted online through the Submittable portal by the deadline to be considered. We will not accept any applications or documents via email, mail or fax. **For your application to be considered complete, you must upload all required materials to your application in Submittable, including:**

- Initial Eligibility Form
- Application, which includes:
  - Demographic, practice, and licensure information
  - Proof of U.S. citizenship
  - Practice type, location, and employment status

- Completed Employment Verification Form\* (This form is sent to your practice manager via the Submittable system and must be completed by the application deadline in order for your application to be considered complete)
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)

\* **Please note:** you must have a practice site/employment location secured to be eligible for this program. For resources for identifying non-urbanized employment opportunities in South Carolina, please visit the [South Carolina Office of Rural Health's \(SCORH\) website](#).

## Contract

Accepted providers will sign a contract with South Carolina AHEC and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to practice behavioral health in an underserved area for a designated amount of time. Guidelines require that the provider will:

- Practice in the designated underserved area as mutually agreed upon.
- In providing health services, not discriminate against any person on the basis of such person's ability to pay.
- Accept both Medicare and Medicaid.
- Must be licensed to provide services in South Carolina by the appropriate licensing agency or serve as a Mental Health Professional (MHP) at the South Carolina BHDD Office of Mental Health
- Practice must meet State of South Carolina guidelines as defined by law.

Continuation of the contracts from year to year is contingent upon the availability of funds allocated by the South Carolina General Assembly. Accepted providers are expected to maintain an outpatient behavioral health practice at the designated location. The provider does not have the option of relocating to another practice location without specific advance approval of the South Carolina Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Board. The provider also does not have the option of relocating to another practice location within the same organization without specific advance approval of the Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program Board.

## Payment

Payment schedules will be determined by the total amount of award and will be included in the contracts. Payments are made annually at the end of the contract year. If the practitioner leaves the employment of the practice during the contract year, the practitioner will be considered to have terminated the contract and will not receive the annual payment.

## More Information

For more information about the South Carolina Rural Behavioral Health Professional Incentive Program, please visit our FAQ page <https://www.scahec.net/recruitment/rural-bhp-incentive.html#faq>.