



The Rural Connection

News from the Kansas Center for Rural Health

From the Director



Happy holiday season! We have had a busy semester at the Kansas Center for Rural Health and have some exciting updates to share with you in this newsletter. First, I want to remind everyone of our new membership model. Over the summer, a new model for engagement with the center was developed and the Rural Health Council was replaced by a formal model of KCRH Membership. The goal

of this new model is to improve internal and external engagement with KCRH, while allowing the center to better track and work with those interested in our mission. There are three types of membership: internal, external, and student. The details for this new framework are available on our [website](#), and we encourage you to join!

Aside from reminding you of our new memberships, I want to draw your attention to the recently announced award to the University of Kansas Medical Center and the University of Kansas Health System from The Patterson Family Foundation. With the goal of increasing access to specialty care across rural communities in Kansas, this \$12.1 million grant will support the expansion of telehealth models that facilitate specialty physician visits within rural clinics for high demand specialties. Beyond the expansion of services, the award will support a robust assessment of access to specialty care across the state—led by the Kansas Center for Rural Health. We are very excited about this development and encourage you to read the full press release below.

I also want to make you aware of the resources and archived events available on our website. We have held several events this Fall, including three Navigating Rural Health Together seminars. All of our events are recorded and hosted on our website, and we also have a variety of links to resources for students, health professionals, and faculty. Finally, we continue to publish our research briefs via the KCRH Rural Research Committee. All of these resources can be used for independent learning, teaching at the high school level and above, or helping inform your own research. If you ever have any questions about our resources, please reach out.

Finally, I am happy to announce a new way to support the center. With the help of the KU Medical Center Department of Population Health, we have established a Friends of KCRH fund. This fund supports the general operations of the center and will allow us to support, host, and catalyze programming aligned with our mission. If you are interested in supporting KCRH, please visit our support page [here](#).

As the center continues to pursue our mission across the state, I encourage you to reach out with ideas and opportunities for partnerships. The Kansas Center for Rural Health is committed to reducing health disparities, growing the rural healthcare workforce, and improving care delivery. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work with all of you in achieving this mission.

Sincerely,

J. Tom Mueller, PhD
Director of the Kansas Center for Rural Health
Assistant Professor, Department of Population Health

Multidisciplinary Virtual Care for Young Adults with Type 1 Diabetes Living in Rural Areas: REACT-T1D

Researcher:

Daniel R. Tilden, MD., MPH

Assistant Professor, Endocrinology, Diabetes and Clinical Pharmacology. Research Assistant Professor, University of Missouri - Kansas City

What is the REACT-T1D project?

The project aims to improve diabetes care for rural young adults with T1D by identifying provider barriers and solutions, then testing a virtual collaborative care program (REACT-T1D) with PCPs to enhance access to guideline-based treatment.

What inspired your involvement in rural-focused research?

After college, I taught high school science in rural North Carolina—my first experience living in a rural area, which shaped my path in medicine (and where I met my wife!).

After completing my medical training, I had the opportunity to return home to KUMC. One of the key reasons I came home was the chance to start rural outreach clinics as a part of my clinical practice. I was excited to be able to work and partner with rural providers to care for their patients and inspired by the opportunity to be a part of the impact that KU has across the state. As my practice grew, I realized how little the broader diabetes community knew about barriers rural patients and providers were experiencing in getting access to care. Improving care delivery for rural Kansans through research became an obvious and essential next step in my clinical work.

How would you describe the central aim of the REACT-T1D project?

The project has two aims: first, to understand gaps and barriers providers face in caring for young adults with type 1 diabetes; second, to pilot a care model using a nurse coordinator to help patients and rural providers access our multidisciplinary diabetes team. Our goal is a patient-driven clinic model that leverages the strengths of both PCPs and the diabetes care team. PCPs offer strong relationships but juggle many roles, while our team—nurses, educators, dietitians, and pharmacists—specializes in diabetes care. The model uses targeted outreach to



identify needs and match patients with the right provider for timely support.

What unique challenges or insights have emerged from working with rural primary care clinics?

I've had the privilege of working with rural providers through outreach clinics and visiting numerous sites across the state. I'm

consistently struck by the dedication and thoughtfulness of providers and staff in delivering high-quality patient care. Despite skepticism from some grant reviewers, these interactions convinced me that including rural providers as key members of our clinical model would not only succeed but be a vital asset to our program's success.

Why do you feel rural research is important in informing broader healthcare solutions?

Twenty percent of the population lives in rural areas, so we cannot address major healthcare issues without engaging rural health. More importantly, understanding and solving gaps in rural care can inform innovations across all settings. While challenges differ between rural and urban areas, solutions in one often inspire progress in the other. By carefully studying and improving rural care, we have the opportunity to enhance healthcare for everyone.

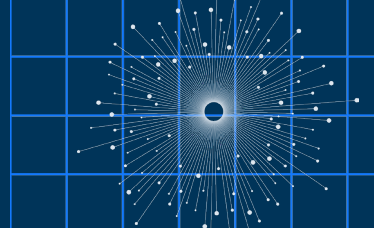
How can others engage with or support the REACT-T1D initiative?

We are actively recruiting providers to participate in interviews – if you practice in a rural setting and care for young adults with Type 1 Diabetes, we'd love to have you join!

<https://redcap.kumc.edu/surveys/?s=XAXKA7LYJ8JR3XLK>

In the coming 6-12 months we will be recruiting rural clinics to be a part of our pilot intervention. If you or your clinic is interested in participating, please feel free to reach out to me directly – dtilden@kumc.edu

Rural Research Opportunities



Medical Mingle

The KU Medical Center Office of Rural Medical Education and the Kansas Center for Rural Health held their inaugural Kansas Medical Mingle event in Wichita. At this event, medical students and residents had the opportunity to meet with potential rural hospital employers in a casual and informal setting. Over food and drinks, ten medical students and residents interested in practicing in rural Kansas had the opportunity to speak with representatives from hospitals in Salina, McPherson, Osborne, and Hoisington about their communities, medical facilities, and needs.

The goals of the event were to allow future physicians and rural hospitals to connect in a more intimate setting than allowed in large job fairs. Additionally, the format allowed rural-interested students and residents to meet one another and find like-minded peers who might be going to similar regions. This session focused on the north central region, with more regions being spotlighted in the future.

Connect with KCRH Membership

Stay engaged with the Kansas Center for Rural Health!

Inspired by successful models from academic and medical centers, KCRH provides a new membership structure that offers meaningful opportunities to collaborate, connect, and contribute to rural health efforts across Kansas.

Whether you're a provider, researcher, student, or community leader, there's a membership pathway for you—each designed to strengthen relationships, amplify your work, and expand support for rural initiatives. From pilot funding and mentorship to priority event access and networking, members will be at the heart of KCRH's mission to improve health and equity in rural Kansas.

[Click here to learn more >>](#)

Be a Friend of Rural Health: Join the Movement for a Healthier Kansas

Across Kansas, rural communities are the backbone of our state — strong, connected, and full of potential.

Yet, too many continue to face challenges in accessing care and maintaining a robust local health workforce. The Kansas Center for Rural Health (KCRH), launched in 2022 by the University of Kansas School of Medicine, is working to change that.

Through collaboration, research, education, and service, KCRH is building pathways to equitable health care for all Kansans. You can be part of this mission by joining the Friends of the Kansas Center for Rural Health — a growing network of supporters dedicated to strengthening rural health systems, advancing education, and improving lives across the state.

Your support helps expand workforce training, fund community-driven research, and foster the partnerships that keep Kansas strong. Together, we can build a healthier, more resilient rural Kansas. [Learn more or make a donation>>](#)

Groundwater Quality Project

Do you want to know about the quality of your water well?

The Kansas Geological Survey is launching a statewide effort to sample 300 wells over two years to establish baseline groundwater chemistry and track future changes—at no cost to well owners. A new public data platform will allow users to explore water quality near them and across the state. The goal: empower Kansans to protect and manage this vital resource. [Learn more more >>](#)

KU School of Nursing Partners with McPherson College

September 11, 2025 | Kay Hawes

New collaboration will allow McPherson College students to earn a bachelor's degree from KU School of Nursing without relocating to Kansas City. Students at McPherson College in central Kansas now have an option to pursue a bachelor's degree from KU School of Nursing.

The University of Kansas School of Nursing hopes to welcome many more graduates from central Kansas and surrounding areas with a new partnership with McPherson College. Students at McPherson College in central Kansas now have an option to pursue a bachelor's degree from KU School of Nursing.

This new partnership with KU School of Nursing will make it possible for McPherson College students to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, with courses beginning in the 2026-27 academic year. That degree will come from KU, and the students will be able to complete courses on the KU School of Nursing's Salina campus and online. Since there's no need to relocate, the hope is that more students will choose to practice in Central Kansas or similar rural areas in the state.

"KU School of Nursing is excited to partner with McPherson College to help more central Kansas students become nurses," said Jean Foret Giddens, Ph.D., FAAN, dean of KU School of Nursing. "Our Salina campus community is ready to welcome, educate and graduate nurses prepared to practice in rural communities and beyond."

The collaboration strengthens McPherson College's commitment to addressing health care needs in rural Kansas. "McPherson College and KU School of Nursing share the same goal of educating health care professionals to support the workforce needs of rural Kansas," said McPherson College Executive Vice President Aaron Meis, Ed.D. "A critical nursing workforce shortage exists in many rural Kansas communities. Our collaboration with KU School of Nursing's Salina campus will educate nurses interested in and committed to serving in rural settings, including those like the McPherson Center for Health."

Students enrolling in the program will complete 60 credits of prerequisite nursing courses at the McPherson campus. They will be eligible for guaranteed admissions into the KU nursing program and complete the remaining 60 credits of nursing courses at the KU campus in Salina and online, while remaining at McPherson College. Nursing degrees will be awarded by KU. Clinical experiences will be available at health care agencies located in rural communities, including Salina and McPherson.

"This program is designed for students interested in studying nursing at a strong, well-resourced public institution while retaining a small, residential liberal arts college experience," Meis said. Students from KU School of Nursing's Salina campus tend to practice in more rural areas of the state. This partnership will allow McPherson College students to easily transition to the Salina campus of KU School of Nursing.

A report published last fall by the Kansas Nursing Workforce Center, based at KU School of Nursing, found a direct correlation between the number of nurses per 1,000 residents and county health outcome rankings. "The number of nurses matters to the health and well-being of Kansans," the report stated. The second volume of the report, issued this month, anticipates continued nursing shortages as 26% of registered nurses and 23% of licensed practical nurses in Kansas are planning to retire within the next five years, and enrollment in nursing education programs is down 38% over the past 10 years. Additionally, the Kansas Department of Labor predicts the state will need more than 28,000 nursing assistants, 18,000 registered nurses, and 6,000 home health aides in 2026.

Want to Get Involved with KCRH?

We're always looking to highlight great work happening across rural Kansas! If you have an article, event, or initiative you'd like to share in an upcoming issue, we'd love to hear from you.

Submit your story or event to KCRH@kumc.edu

Grant to Expand Healthcare Access for Rural Kansans

New initiative supported by \$12 million grant aims to boost access to specialty care in rural Kansas.

The University of Kansas Medical Center and The University of Kansas Health System partner with the Patterson Family Foundation to support care close to home.

The initiative brings together research, rural outreach and clinical care from both organizations to improve, measure and increase health care in rural Kansas. The University of Kansas Medical Center and The University of Kansas Health System today announced a new initiative to create and improve rural health care in Kansas. Supported in part by a \$12 million grant from the Patterson Family Foundation, the goal of this initiative is to increase access to specialty care in rural communities across Kansas.

“Our charge from the Patterson Family Foundation is clear: This partnership must increase specialty care access for rural provider organizations to meet the needs of their patients and their families,” said Simon Craddock Lee, Ph.D., MPH, chair of the Department of Population Health at KU School of Medicine and associate director for cancer workforce initiatives at KU Cancer Center.

“Rural communities are the heart of Kansas, and they deserve access to the right care at the right time,” said Jessica Hunt, vice president of strategy and programs at the Patterson Family Foundation. “Building on the Care Collaborative’s long-standing investment in rural health, this effort expands telehealth connections and specialty care access — working alongside rural providers who are vital to helping their communities thrive. We’re proud to support this collaboration and the shared commitment to strengthening health care across rural Kansas.”

This new initiative brings together research, rural outreach and clinical care from both organizations to improve, measure and increase health care in rural Kansas.

“The University of Kansas Medical Center is pleased to be a part of this collaborative project, which demonstrates the real strength of academic medicine — our researchers and care providers working side by side to find solutions to health-related issues,” said Steve Stites, M.D., executive vice chancellor of KU Medical Center. “This project is just one of the many ways the University

of Kansas is making a difference to improve the health of Kansans, especially for those in rural areas.”

The initiative will include:

- Researchers from the Kansas Center for Rural Health at KU Medical Center will conduct a statewide assessment of specialty and sub-specialty care, as well as therapies and testing needed to support this care.
- Based on the assessment, teams from The University of Kansas Health System’s Care Collaborative and defined medical specialty areas will work with Care Collaborative members, who are rural health care providers, to coordinate diagnostic and therapeutic services close to patients’ homes.
- Specialists will partner virtually with rural primary care providers and patients to provide expertise in diagnosis and treatment planning, assuring patients have access to the latest training and evidence-based practices, as well as more rapid access to medical advances.
- Researchers in population health will work throughout the process to better understand the most impactful tools and techniques to create better health outcomes, which can then be replicated in other areas.

The Care Collaborative, an initiative of The University of Kansas Health System, was formed in 2014. It supports quality performance improvement initiatives for 91 member organizations across 79 Kansas counties. This four-year grant builds on the Care Collaborative’s efforts to help enhance high-quality clinical care in rural areas and improve the health of people living in rural Kansas communities.

“The University of Kansas Hospital was created to support the health of all Kansans. More than 100 years later, we remain committed to the health and vitality of Kansans and their communities,” said Bob Page, president and CEO of The University of Kansas Health System. “This new initiative will help change lives and communities by offering access to specialist care closer to home and supporting local economies through strengthened health care delivery.”

An additional goal of the project is to support workforce development, therapy and testing in local communities.

McPherson Center for Health's High School Internship Program Preparing the Next Generation of Healthcare Professionals

McPherson Center for Health's High School Internship Program: Preparing the Next Generation of Healthcare Professionals

The High School Internship Program at McPherson Center for Health provides local students with hands-on healthcare experience while addressing staffing needs in critical entry-level roles. Since expanding in 2023, more than 30 seniors from McPherson High School have participated, and several have gone on to join the hospital team as CNAs, phlebotomists, or in administrative roles.

The program is designed for students who have completed the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course at McPherson High School. Interns spend approximately 90 minutes per day over a semester, rotating through departments such as nursing, surgery, radiology, respiratory care, and EMS. This provides students with the opportunity to shadow healthcare professionals, practice skills, and gain real-world insight into hospital operations.

Director of Education and Patient Experience and HOSA Advisor, Jamie Hicks, emphasizes the program's dual impact: "We have so much talent right here in McPherson. Often, students imagine a bigger healthcare system will be more exciting. By bringing them into our rural hospital and letting them experience the sense of family and patient-centered care that defines us, we hope it will inspire them to return to rural communities."

Interest in the internship program far exceeds the number of available spots. To help meet the growing demand, several hospital employees have stepped in as advisors for McPherson High School's HOSA – Future Health Professionals chapter.

While HOSA advisor roles are typically filled by classroom teachers, these hospital employee volunteers provide additional mentorship and guidance, giving students more exposure to healthcare careers. HOSA offers leadership development, technical skill-building, and insight into healthcare professions, this compliments the hands-on experience provided through the internship. Hospital leaders: Dara Reese, Chief Nursing Officer, Charity Clark, Chief Operating Officer, and Karly Clinkscale, Administration Executive Assistant also serve as HOSA advisors with Mrs. Hicks.

Charity Clark, Chief Operating Officer at McPherson Center for Health, emphasizes the broader impact: "Jamie's leadership is creating opportunities that truly prepare students for healthcare careers. Through the internship program and her work with HOSA, she is helping develop the next generation of caregivers who are ready and inspired to serve the community."

By combining the internship program with HOSA mentorship, McPherson Center for Health is helping students explore healthcare careers while building a strong pipeline of talent for rural healthcare.

U-CHaMP Launches the REAL Clinical Experience

The Underserved Communities Have a Medical Provider (U-CHaMP) program is proud to announce its first student selected for the Rural Explorer and Learner (REAL) Clinical Experience. Sabine Jean-Philippe, a respiratory care student at the KU School of Health Professions, will complete a two-week clinical rotation at the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas in Pittsburg, KS. During her rotation, Sabine will gain hands-on experience addressing rural health disparities, participate in clinical and research activities focused on chronic respiratory disease management, and shadow a physician treating patients with chronic conditions. This initiative supports U-CHaMP's mission to strengthen health care in rural and underserved Kansas communities.

In addition, U-CHaMP is partnering with the Kansas Hospital Association to survey health care organizations statewide to identify workforce needs, including provider shortages, scholarship opportunities, and loan forgiveness programs for new graduates. To learn more about U-CHaMP, please visit www.kumc.edu/uchamp.

Mitchell County Hospital Health Systems Earns National Recognition for Birthing Center

Beloit, KS – Mitchell County Hospital Health Systems (MCHHS) is gaining national attention for the quality of care provided in its Birthing Center, where families in North Central Kansas find both comfort and excellence close to home.

MCHHS has earned the CMS Birthing-Friendly Designation, the first federal designation recognizing hospitals that meet high national standards for maternal and infant health. This honor places the Beloit facility among a select group of hospitals across the country recognized for safe, supportive, and high-quality birthing care.

The hospital has also been recognized through the High 5 for Mom & Baby program, a statewide initiative that encourages best practices for breastfeeding success and mother-baby bonding. In addition, MCHHS was named one of America's Best Hospitals for Obstetrics by the Women's Choice Award®, a recognition that reflects both patient satisfaction and clinical performance in labor and delivery services.

Beyond delivery, MCHHS is committed to supporting mothers in the crucial weeks after birth. The hospital recently achieved Gold Level recognition in the Fourth Trimester Initiative, a program led by the Kansas

Department of Health and Environment and the Kansas Perinatal Quality Collaborative. This recognition highlights the hospital's dedication to postpartum care, including overall continuity of care for new mothers.

Central to these achievements is the dedication of the hospital's staff, including Certified Lactation Counselors (CLC) and maternal health professionals who guide families through every step of the birthing journey. MCHHS also participates in Rural Moms (RMOMs) programs, extending support and resources beyond hospital walls to ensure families have what they need throughout pregnancy and postpartum.

"Our community deserves high-quality maternity care close to home, and we're proud to provide that here in Beloit," said Nicki Cleveland, Chief Nursing Officer. "These recognitions reflect not only our commitment to safe and supportive birthing practices, but also the compassion and skill of our staff."

For families in Mitchell County and surrounding communities, these honors mean peace of mind. Mothers can deliver their babies in a welcoming environment that has earned national recognition for excellence, while still enjoying the personal touch of a community hospital.

KU Expands Rural Health Training with New Hybrid Physical Therapy Pathway

The University of Kansas has introduced a hybrid Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) pathway designed to increase access to physical therapists across the state and beyond. By combining online coursework with on-campus lab experiences, the hybrid pathway offers the same high-quality curriculum and clinical preparation as KU's on campus DPT program, while providing greater flexibility for students balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

The hybrid format allows students to complete much of their didactic coursework remotely, traveling to the KU Medical Center campus in Kansas City for periodic in-person lab sessions. This structure makes it possible for students to remain in their home communities for much of their training, helping to strengthen connections with local health systems and support the development of a diverse, workforce-ready group of physical therapists.

Graduates of both the residential and hybrid pathways earn the same KU Doctor of Physical Therapy degree and are equally prepared to provide evidence-based, patient-centered care in a variety of settings, including rural and underserved areas.

Applications for the hybrid pathway are now open. For more information, visit our [website](#).

Upcoming Events



45th Annual Family Medicine Winter Symposium

Thursday, December 4, 2025

National Center for Aviation Training

4004 N. Webb Rd., Wichita, KS 67226-8101

or Via Zoom

Hosted by KU School of Medicine–Wichita, the Family Medicine Winter Symposium offers a range of presentations and exhibits to enhance clinical knowledge for physicians, PAs, and advanced nurse practitioners—registration now open!

[For details and registration click HERE >>](#)

Navigating Rural Health Together: Understanding Social Determinants in Rural Kansas

Water Access in Rural Kansas: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 @ 2 P.M.

Broadband Access in Rural Kansas: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 @ 2 P.M.

Transportation Access in Rural Kansas: Tuesday, April 14, 2026 @ 2 P.M.

Join us for Navigating Rural Health Together: Understanding Social Determinants in Rural Kansas—a three-part spring webinar series exploring water, broadband, and transportation access. Hear from researchers and rural partners working to improve healthcare access and equity across Kansas. Registration now open!

[For details and registration click HERE >>](#)

2026 KCRH Kansas Rural Maternal Health Symposium

March 27, 2026

Salina Hilton Garden Inn

Salina, KS

Join changemakers from across the state as we come together to collaborate on improving rural maternal health across Kansas. [For details and registration click HERE >>](#)



Publications and Articles

Zhang, E., Snyder, M., Alduraidi, W., et al. (2025). *Pilot rural–urban comparison of health care experiences among autistic adolescents and young adults*. *Autism*. [Read full article click here>>](#)

Zhang, E., Snyder, M., Alduraidi, W., et al. (2024). *Health care transition for autistic adolescents and young adults: A pilot rural and urban comparison survey study*. *Autism*. 29(6), 1403–1414. [Read full article click here>>](#)

Stay connected with us!

Visit the Kansas Center for Rural Health website at kumc.edu/kcrh for the latest updates, resources and upcoming events.

And please follow us on Facebook for daily insights, stories and conversations that matter. Let’s keep the momentum going — join the community and stay in the loop!



Facebook.com/Kansas-Center-for-Rural--Health

The Kansas Center for Rural Health aims to identify and reduce rural health disparities and improve the rural health care workforce and care delivery through research, education and service.

