

WHITE PAPER:

10 Things Missouri Counties Can Do To Improve Rural Healthcare

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The rural population is at a disadvantage when it comes to health. Individuals in rural Missouri are often in poorer physical and mental health, and their access to high quality care and treatment is limited because of distance, geography, and cost. But there's hope: counties have the opportunity to improve the lives of Missourians living in these areas by using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for local health and wellness initiatives.

By using ARPA funds to support initiatives that improve the health of their residents, counties can help people live longer and happier lives in Missouri's rural communities. As local leaders work with community members to address these issues, they can take steps to ensure all Missourians have access to affordable, high-quality healthcare.

Below are 10 ways counties can invest ARPA money in rural health initiatives that could produce big changes for their residents' well-being.

- 1** Communicate a culture of wellness. Develop campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of wellness and healthy behaviors—such as eating nutritious foods, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco use and drug abuse, vaccinating pets and livestock against diseases that can spread to humans, masking and vaccinating against COVID-19, and getting an annual flu shot.
- 2** Fund Fitness programs. According to AmericasHealthRankings.org's State Findings, Missouri 2020, just 17.1 percent of adults in the state exercise, 30.6 percent are physically inactive, and a staggering 34.8 percent are considered obese.
- 3** Fight back against misinformation. If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that misinformation can be fatal. Combat misinformation about vaccines and other medical topics by funding health education programs that promote accurate information about disease prevention and treatment.
- 4** Improve access to healthy food options. Ways to do this include supporting local farmers' markets, providing fresh foods in schools and senior centers, and adjusting zoning regulations or providing financial incentives to attract new retailers that sell fresh and frozen healthy foods.



- 5** Meet patients where they are. Invest in telemedicine and tele-mental health services so rural Missourians can receive high-quality medical care and behavioral services without having to travel long distances. Another idea is to create a mobile health unit that can travel to the communities in your county to provide health screenings, immunizations, and other services.

- 6** Update your county website. Help residents find the resources they need to access high-quality health services, including transportation, child care, and access to home care for seniors.

- 7** Provide scholarships to encourage residents to stay in school and/or seek vocational training. They'll have more employment opportunities offering better wages as a result, which could increase their income and improve their financial security. This is important from a health standpoint because poverty has been linked to poor physical health outcomes such as obesity.

- 8** Improve access to mental health services. As mentioned earlier, tele-health options are helpful. Other ideas include providing mental healthcare services that are easily accessible at local health clinics and offering more affordable counseling in schools, community centers, churches, or other places where residents already congregate.

- 9** Address the opioid crisis that is taking lives across Missouri by expanding Naloxone access. Train and authorize all first responders to administer Naloxone. In addition, provide resources for drug and alcohol addiction treatment programs through nonprofit organizations.

- 10** Invest in community health and wellness centers. No one should have to travel for hours to receive medical care. Build a network of community health clinics where patients have quick, affordable access to doctors' offices, flu shots, pharmacies, and health screenings. Modernize existing facilities to ensure that they're up-to-date on the latest technologies and build new centers in underserved communities. Coil Health can help you design a health facility that meets the needs in your county.

For more information, contact:

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