

Maryland Mid-Shore Rural Health Collaborative

Larry Hogan
Governor
State of Maryland

Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
Maryland General Assembly

Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the House
Maryland General Assembly

Robert R. Neall
Secretary of Health
Maryland Department of Health

November 17, 2021

Update from the Maryland Mid-Shore Rural Health Collaborative in Response to Senate Bill 1056 (2018)

Dear Governor Hogan, President Ferguson, Speaker Jones, and Secretary Neall:

On behalf of the Maryland Mid-Shore Rural Health Collaborative (RHC), please find attached a 2020 calendar year update, Establishing Rural Health Complexes in Maryland's Mid-Shore Region, as mandated per Senate Bill 1056 (2018) and in accordance with§ 2-1246 of the State Government article.

There remains a need for ensuring access to and coordinating health and social support services on the Mid-Shore. The RHC recommends a practical approach to meeting these needs by building on existing services and programs. These existing services and programs have been successful in providing high-quality health and social support services to Mid-Shore residents and expanding these services and programs will immediately address Mid-Shore needs. Investing in the Mid-Shore Region's existing services and programs is a cost-effective and practical approach to improving health. In the interest of health and well-being for Mid-Shore residents, the RHC calls upon the State of Maryland to make immediate and sustainable investments in the region's current programs, and to support expansion and replication of programs that work.

We look forward to working with you to help meet the health needs of Mid-Shore residents.

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President
Maryland Mid-Shore Rural Health Collaborative

An update on the Maryland Rural Health Collaborative's Overarching Recommendations to Facilitate Health Improvement Efforts within the Mid-Shore Region

As stated in the December 2020 legislative report Establishing Rural Health Complexes in Maryland's Mid-Shore Region 'there are a variety of needs within the Mid-Shore Region that, if addressed, could improve health, and there are a variety of ways to address these needs. The Rural Health Collaborative (RHC) concluded that the best path forward is to build on the services and programs that already exist in Mid-Shore communities, ensuring that they are adequately resourced to meet the needs of the population and sufficiently connected to do so effectively and efficiently. Services and programs are not uniform across counties and communities. Rural health complexes need to build on the foundation of this existing infrastructure to provide solutions customized to the communities they serve. Rural health complexes should be innovative, adaptable, and tailored to offer new and sustainable opportunities for improving health throughout the Mid-Shore.'

Recommendation #1 Implement programs to increase the numbers and types of health professionals, such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse midwives, social workers, and dental hygienists, as well as community health workers (CHWs), who will add capacity to the network of care providers in the Mid-Shore Region.

Update: A consortium of RHC members representing the Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center, Choptank Community Health System, Maryland Rural Health Association, University of Maryland Shore Regional Health and the Horowitz Center for Health Literacy, convened to begin the study of health professional recruitment and retention strategies. Leveraging a planning grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the group looked specifically at Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot counties to focus early efforts with the goal of broadening to Kent and Queen Anne's County in subsequent years. This planning group will be positioned as a workgroup under the Mid Shore Health Improvement Coalition and preliminary findings will be shared in early 2022.

Recommendation #2 Instruct county and State agencies to study and design models that offer improved coordination of health and social support services.

Recommendation #3 Create an information hub, or "social home," to facilitate the coordination of health and social support services that impact health status.

Update: For the health of Mid-Shore residents, it is important to learn from rural projects that have been successful in coordinating services for clients to determine which programs produce the best results for the resources required, and then to both promote and invest in those programs for sustainability and expansion. The 2020 RHC report stated 'The Mid-Shore Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC) could play an important role in studying and evaluating

models designed to improve coordination of health and social support services.' Commencing in the fall of 2021, funding was made available through an LHIC grant from the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission to support this work. Beginning in December of 2021, a workgroup will be positioned under the Mid Shore LHIC to 1) understand residents' issues and concerns about the coordination of health and social support services; 2) study and evaluate models designed to improve coordination of health and social support services; and 3) start the process of compiling regional health and social support resources. Findings will be shared in the spring/summer of 2022.

Recommendation #4 Fund expansion of existing Mid-Shore services and programs to meet standards and criteria for a rural health complex. Specific recommendations to build on existing infrastructure within the Mid-Shore Region include:

- Build upon the services of the Mid-Shore Region's sole Federally Qualified Health Center, Choptank Community Health System (Choptank), to cover the entire Mid-Shore Region. Choptank has demonstrated its capability to meet health needs. Additional and sustainable investments by the State of Maryland in Choptank are necessary to expand capacity to serve the entire MidShore Region.
- Ensure reimbursement and expansion of telehealth. Telehealth has been a highly effective way to deliver services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustaining and expanding telehealth will enhance the Mid-Shore's longer-term ability to provide needed health services.
- Ensure reimbursement and expansion of Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) services. MIH services have been demonstrated to be cost-effective and meet important needs of Mid-Shore residents. Reliable and sustainable funding is necessary for MIH to meet long-term needs on the MidShore.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health and social support services delivery through strategies such as colocation of services and flexibility in use of State funds. Successful approaches for coordinating the delivery of health and social support services have been demonstrated. Attention should be given to expanding these approaches throughout the Mid-Shore Region.
- Engage the Mid-Shore Region's two hospital systems, University of Maryland Shore Regional Health and Anne Arundel Medical Center, in developing strategies and actions to fill gaps in specialty care and better coordinate with other providers of healthcare, dental care, behavioral health, and social support services. The Mid-Shore Region's hospital systems have demonstrated a desire to address unmet needs for health services. Maryland's Health Services Cost Review Commission can provide the flexibility and incentives for these hospital systems to enhance their efforts in meeting these needs.

Update: The RHC strongly believes that immediate attention to build on the Mid-Shore Region's existing infrastructure will have a positive and sustainable impact on the health of the region's residents.