



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**FY 2024-2025**



**TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™**

**Division of  
RURAL AFFAIRS**

# Division of Rural Affairs: Uniting Tradition and Technology

The Division of Rural Affairs launched in January 2024. It was formed by merging the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health (FMHIRCH) and the Institute for Telehealth and Digital Innovation (ITDI). This merger unites strong community roots with digital innovation. Together, they are finding new ways to expand healthcare access across rural West Texas.

FMHIRCH and ITDI address the critical health needs of rural West Texas through applied research, workforce training, and community outreach. Communities in the Panhandle play a vital role in national agriculture, energy, and fiber production. By expanding access to care, building local capacity, and implementing sustainable solutions, the Division of Rural Affairs aims to enhance the health and resilience of populations that significantly contribute to the economy.

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) began its commitment to rural communities in 1997 with the establishment of the Office of Rural and Community Health. In 2006, an endowment from F. Marie Hall transformed the office into the FMHIRCH. Since that time, the Institute has promoted innovation in rural health across Texas by leading statewide pilot programs, supporting multidisciplinary research, forging strategic partnerships, and securing substantial funding from both state and federal sources. FMHIRCH emphasizes workforce development by training future healthcare professionals and pioneering initiatives in telemedicine, emergency communications, and simulation-based training to address rural health needs.

In response to the increasing demand for virtual care, TTUHSC established the ITDI in 2023 with support from the Texas Legislature. ITDI enhances TTUHSC's digital infrastructure and clinical partnerships, positioning the university as a leader in virtual health innovation.

Today, the Division of Rural Affairs consolidates these initiatives within a unified platform. This development represents a transformative model that advances scalable, technology-enabled, community-based care to address the evolving health needs of rural Texans.



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# Letter from the Executive Vice President



**COLEMAN JOHNSON, JD**

FY25 has been a year of transformation, growth, and renewed purpose for the Division of Rural Affairs at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC). As we continue to unify and elevate our rural health mission, we've welcomed new team members, launched innovative programs, and secured critical funding to expand access to care across West Texas and beyond.

This year, we celebrated the renewal of the TexLa Telehealth Resource Center, supported by a \$1.3 million grant from the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA). This investment enables us to expand digital health services across Texas and Louisiana, opening opportunities to support our partners as they advance telehealth initiatives. Through the Frontiers in Telemedicine (FIT) Lab, we continue to train providers in telemedicine best practices, transitioning to a virtual-platform, ensuring rural patients receive timely, high-quality care regardless of geography.

And speaking of telemedicine, we also launched the Davis Mountains Telehealth Clinic in Fort Davis, a pioneering model housed in a retrofitted shipping container that now delivers primary and behavioral health services to one of the most medically underserved counties in Texas. This project exemplifies our commitment to meeting communities where they are, using innovation to overcome barriers and deliver care.

In partnership with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), TTUHSC received a \$125,000 federal grant to launch the Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Project ECHO, providing education for rural clinicians treating aging populations. This initiative, addresses the critical shortage of dementia care specialists in Texas.

We also secured continued state appropriations for both the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health and the Institute for Telehealth and Digital Innovation (ITDI), reinforcing our strategic priorities and enabling the launch of five transformative initiatives. These include:

- Telepsychiatry services in partnership with TORCH hospitals, providing 24/7 access to mental health care in emergency departments across rural Texas
- Mobile breast cancer screenings in the Abilene region using Bexa™ sonography, ensuring early detection and follow-up care regardless of ability to pay
- Campus Health Connect, a school-based telehealth program serving K-12 students in rural districts
- Digital infrastructure expansion, including remote patient monitoring and telehealth equipment upgrades for specialty clinics
- Community health assessments in Crane and Pecos, identifying health conditions and guiding local solutions through digital tools with the Healthy West Texas Initiative

The West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program also played a pivotal role in advancing our rural health mission. AHEC initiatives reached thousands of students, professionals, and community members. The AHEC Scholars Program offered interdisciplinary learning and rural rotations, while the Double T Health Service Corps engaged students in community health service projects. The CHW Workforce Development Center provided continuing education for Community Health Workers, and pipeline programs facilitated career exploration and mentorship for future rural providers.

The formation of the Division of Rural Affairs itself marks a strategic unification of TTUHSC's rural health efforts, combining the legacy of the F. Marie Hall Institute of Rural and Community Health with the forward-looking vision of ITDI. Together, we are building a resilient, responsive, and innovative framework to serve the 121 counties in our service area, many of which face persistent health disparities, provider shortages, and geographic isolation.

As we reflect on this year of progress, we do so with deep gratitude for our partners, communities, and dedicated staff. The work ahead is significant, but so is our resolve. The Division of Rural Affairs remains steadfast in its mission to advance health equity, empower rural providers, and fulfill TTUHSC's enduring commitment to the people of West Texas.

Warm regards,

**Coleman Johnson, JD**

*Senior Vice President for Rural Affairs, TTUHSC*

*Special Advisor to the President, TTUHSC*

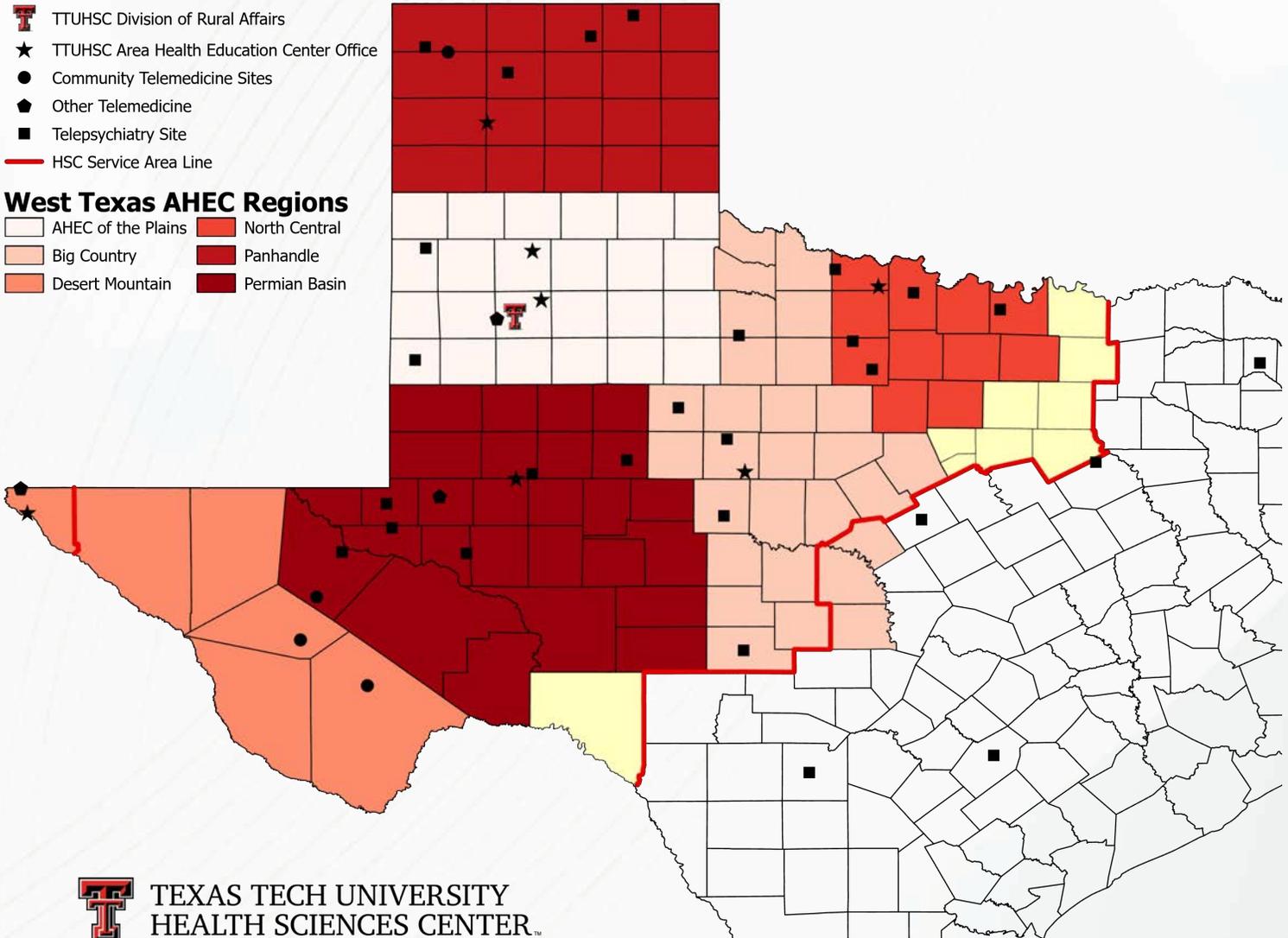
*Associate Vice Chancellor for Governmental Relations, TTU System*

# Service Area Map

-  TTUHSC Division of Rural Affairs
-  TTUHSC Area Health Education Center Office
-  Community Telemedicine Sites
-  Other Telemedicine
-  Telepsychiatry Site
-  HSC Service Area Line

## West Texas AHEC Regions

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  AHEC of the Plains |  North Central |
|  Big Country        |  Panhandle     |
|  Desert Mountain    |  Permian Basin |



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER.

F. Marie Hall Institute for  
Rural and Community Health



**F. Marie Hall Institute**  
for Rural and  
Community Health

## Mission & Vision

The F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health exists to work in close collaboration with the people of West Texas for the advancement of health through innovative and scholarly research, the advanced use of technology, comprehensive education, and community outreach.

***We thank you for allowing us to spend our time with purpose and to strive each and every day to make the world a better place.***

# Serving West Texas

The **F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health (FMHIRCH)** is dedicated to bringing the advancement of health to the people of rural West Texas through innovative and scholarly research, the advanced use of technology, comprehensive education, and outreach. FMHIRCH strives to bring healthcare access, education, and resources to its rural, underserved service region of 121 counties – which is nearly half of the state of Texas.

Access to rural health is essential to supporting the food, fuel, and fiber industries that are the backbone of the Texas economy. With a declining and aging workforce, a strained rural health care system, and far-reaching health disparities in West Texas, the work of the FMHIRCH has never been more crucial. Our work will continue to bridge the healthcare gap in the communities it serves in West Texas and beyond through technology, education, and research.



## TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™

*F. Marie Hall Institute for  
Rural and Community Health*



### HEALTH EDUCATION

Our Transforming Communities through Outreach, Recruitment & Education (T-CORE) team coordinates all of the Institute's educational activities aimed at engaging students who want to enter the health care workforce. Community health worker outreach, the AHEC Jr. Scholars program, and the high school telemedicine program are just a few of the team's projects for FY 2025.



### HEALTH TECHNOLOGY

Our Community Engagement and TexLa Telehealth Resource Center teams work to make sure people living in rural areas have the technology necessary for health care access. They each promote rural healthcare through projects such as Project ECHO and NextGen 911.



### HEALTH RESEARCH

The FMHIRCH creates leading-edge research focused on rural health solutions in West Texas and the 121-county TTUHSC service area. That research is published in peer-reviewed journals and the Rural Health Quarterly, which is indexed on the Rural Health Information Hub.

# F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural **and** Community Health Team



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

F. Marie Hall Institute for  
Rural and Community Health

*FMHIRCH Staff 2024-2025*

# Administrative & Division Team

## 2024-2025

The Administrative team brings their specialized knowledge of finance, human resources, and office support to boost both teams of the Division of Rural Affairs, the F. Marie Hall Institute of Rural and Community Health and the Institute of Telehealth and Digital Innovation.



**SARAH LOOTEN, MPA**  
*Managing Director*



**DENISE LOPEZ,  
MBA, MS**  
*Senior Director of Finance*



**SMILEY GARCIA, MPA**  
*Assistant VP, Rural Policy & Engagement*



**DOLORES PARRISH**  
*Assistant for Staff Relations*



**SUE DAVIS**  
*Senior Office Assistant-  
Executive Assistant*



**KAT LAPPE**  
*Senior Office Assistant*



# Transforming Communities through Outreach, Recruitment & Education (T-CORE)

**Education, outreach, youth recruitment, and community health worker training.**

The **Transforming Communities through Outreach Recruitment and Education (T-CORE)** group provides continuing education and career development opportunities to rural West Texas through the West Texas AHEC. The six regional offices in Abilene (Big Country AHEC), Amarillo (Panhandle AHEC), El Paso (Desert Mountain AHEC), Midland (Permian Basin AHEC), Plainview (AHEC of the Plains), and Wichita Falls (North Central AHEC) coordinate pipeline activities to recruit students and job seekers to enter the healthcare workforce. West Texas AHEC also creates and distributes H.O.T. Jobs, an online tool and publication that highlights healthcare career opportunities throughout this region and the state. West Texas AHEC's mission is to increase healthcare professions training capacity, provide community-based clinical training, and support the retention of healthcare professionals in high-need areas throughout West Texas.

# T-CORE Team 2024-2025



**CATHERINE HUDSON, DPH, MPH**  
*Senior Director of T-CORE*



**WENDY BRYAN, MBA**  
*T-CORE Project Manager*



**MICHELLE CRUMP**  
*Senior Office Assistant*



**LAMICHA HOGAN, PHD, APRN, FNP-BC**  
*Managing Director, WTAHEC*



**JESSE JENKINS, CHW**  
*Database and Reporting Specialist*



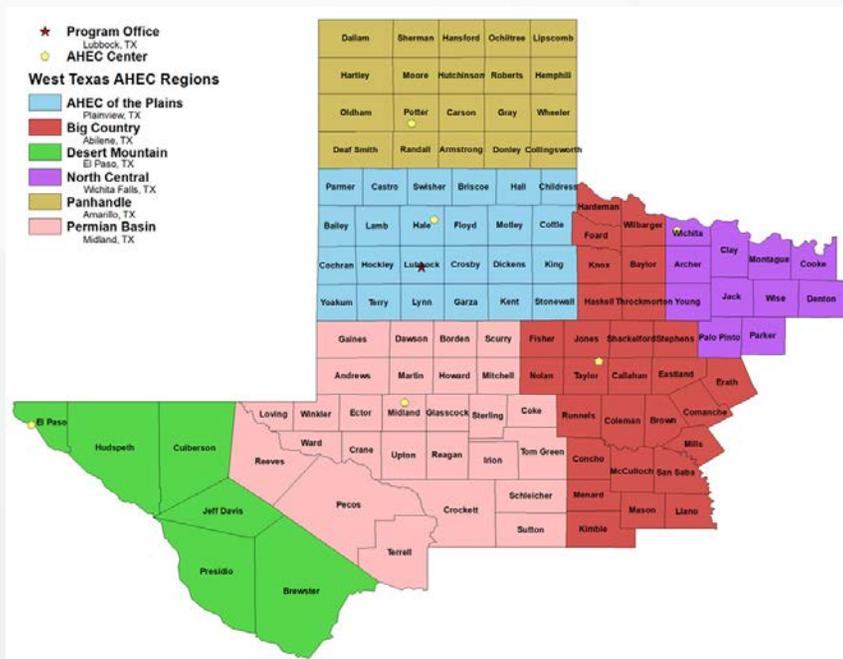
**RACHEL FLORES, CHW**  
*Specialist IV*

# West Texas AHEC

## Area Health Education Centers

West Texas Area Health Education Centers (WTAHEC) are dedicated to transforming healthcare education through pipeline programs to introduce youth and post-secondary students in rural, medically underserved areas to health careers; by expanding community-based opportunities for healthcare provider professional development; and increasing training capacity in rural Texas for clinical health professions.

Located in Amarillo, Plainview, Midland, Abilene, El Paso and Wichita Falls, the West Texas AHEC Centers are dedicated to our unwavering commitment to supporting and educating the current and future healthcare workforce across 121 counties in rural West Texas.



11

West Texas AHEC's Bridge to Excellence CHW Program provided **certification training for 11 new CHWs.**



16k

More than **16k students** learned about potential health care career opportunities through our H.O.T. Jobs presentations.



11k+

183 AHEC Scholars provided more than 12,000 hours of primary care in rural and medically underserved communities.

## 2024-2025 Accomplishments

- More than **16k students** participated in H.O.T. Jobs presentations
- **183 AHEC Scholars** provided:
  - 12,000+ hours of primary care in rural and medically underserved communities
- Bridge to Excellence CHW Program
  - **11 students** completed the course
- **Permian Basin AHEC** awarded the **2025 Center of Excellence** by the National AHEC Organization, just one of four national centers recognized
- 2024 National Rural Health Day Symposium in Odessa



# High School Telemedicine Certificate Curriculum

The **High School Telemedicine Technical Certificate Curriculum** is designed specifically for high school students in rural West Texas. This program teaches practical skills in telemedicine, encompassing clinical procedures, technology, and business management. Students gain hands-on experience to help them build and show their abilities in telemedicine. After finishing the curriculum and passing the instructor's assessment, students receive a technical certificate of completion from TTUHSC to recognize their skills.

Our team recruited six area high schools to participate in the program in 2024-2025, which allowed more than 50 students to successfully complete the course.



West Texas AHEC collaborates with our regional centers to support student organization initiatives, including the **Double T Health Service Corps** (pre-professional health careers, Texas Tech University), the **Rural Student Health Services Mentorship Program** (AHEC of the Plains), the **Junior Scholars Scrubs Club** (Big Country AHEC), and the **High School and Collegiate Double T Honor Societies** (Desert Mountain AHEC, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso). These mentorship programs provide opportunities such as interview preparation workshops, clinical preceptor mentoring by healthcare professionals, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification.

Through rural initiatives, such as **AHEC CONNECT** (Big Country AHEC), a pipeline framework partnering high schools, collegiate programs, clinical system partnerships, and coordinated community connection with high school students has provided opportunities for healthcare simulation at the “Hendrick Health Care Academy” and hybrid CNA certification through the PACE (Partners Advancing Career Education) Healthcare Collaborative Program.

In the Permian Basin, the **2024 Rural Healthcare Summer Camp initiative**, in partnership with Midland College and Sul Ross University, attracted more than 100 high school students into an immersion experience of healthcare activities in rural Brewster County. Desert Mountain AHEC (El Paso) encourages student leadership and advocacy through mentoring opportunities with organizational partnerships such as the **Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA)**. This partnership allows pre-professional healthcare career students a membership in the national organization to build teamwork and collaboration skills through competitions in events such as forensic medicine, clinical nursing, dental science, medical math, and more. Students can compete individually or as a team, empowering them with valuable communication and leadership growth.

**Community-based provider development programs** are crucial in rural and underserved areas as healthcare professionals need ongoing access to continuing education hours to better care for their communities. Coordinated efforts, such as those between Panhandle AHEC (Amarillo) and Amarillo College Department of Continuing Education, have provided numerous contact hours this past year for providers’ ongoing continuing education in areas such as emergency nursing, behavioral health, and respiratory care. Since 2022, more than 84 educational conferences have been provided in the Panhandle area.



# WEST TEXAS AHEC

## Rural Mentorships, Partnerships, and Community Education Programs

# Frontiers in Telemedicine (FIT) Lab

Launched in 2016, the Frontiers in Telemedicine Course is aimed at training clinical staff to effectively use telemedicine. This unique program focuses on competency-based learning and requires students to complete hands-on simulation center training, online modules, and objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) designed to educate and measure knowledge of telemedicine equipment, procedures, etiquette, and ethics. The program also trains licensed health care professionals who want to earn a telemedicine certificate of completion. After completing training, students should be able to demonstrate:

- The basic knowledge of telemedicine and telehealth and define who can benefit from the technology.
- Knowledge of the originating/patient site and distant/provider site, as well as the clinician and staff roles at each location.
- Knowledge of the operation of telemedicine technology.
- Knowledge of a telemedicine encounter.
- The basic ability to assess a patient in the ambulatory telemedicine setting.
- The knowledge required to present and manage a patient with a specific problem. Communication skills in patient and medical team communication.

## FIT Certificate Course

The **Frontiers in Telemedicine Certificate course** is the training program for clinical staff that covers telemedicine technology, clinical encounters, billing, and ethics. The course is now fully online and utilizes a new and more engaging pedagogical approach to provide training necessary for providers to navigate the different approaches to a successful telehealth implementation.

In FY25, **68 healthcare providers** trained in telemedicine technology as part of the Frontiers in Telemedicine Lab program.

### TRAINING CLINICAL STAFF

Since February 1, 2016, the FIT Lab has trained **608 professionals** in Emergency Medicine, Dermatology, Psychiatry, Pediatrics, Internal Medicine, and various Public Health specialties, as well as department chairs from multiple TTUHSC campuses.

# TexLa Team 2024-2025



**KELLY ALVAREZ**  
*InHT Project Manager*



**CAROLINE BOWERS, MS**  
*TexLa Program Manager*



**GLEN SALCIDO**  
*Project ECHO Program Manager*

**The TexLa Telehealth Resource Center (TexLa TRC)** delivers technical assistance and resources to both new and established telehealth programs in Texas and Louisiana. Supported by federal funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), TexLa TRC is one of 14 designated Telehealth Resource Centers nationwide. TexLa TRC collaborates with healthcare organizations, policymakers, and other Telehealth Resource Centers to advance evidence-based telehealth practices. The primary objective of TexLa TRC is to improve healthcare accessibility by expanding telehealth services in rural and underserved communities.





# TexLa Telehealth Resources Center

●  
**Technical Assistance**  
**135**

**Clients Assisted**

As part of its mission, TexLa TRC provides technical assistance to healthcare facilities and providers in Texas and Louisiana. In 2024-2025, the TexLa Telehealth Resource Center completed more than 135 requests for technical assistance, tools, resources, and information regarding telehealth technology, policy, and reimbursement.

●  
**Clinical Encounters**  
**723**

**Telemedicine Patients**

Despite staffing changes in 2024-2025, The Telemedicine program served 723 patients across an average of 12-15 clinics each month. From March 1, 2024, to February 28, 2025, the program served 723 patients.



**Outreach**

In FY25, TexLa TRC provided outreach to various healthcare facilities. These included:

# Project ECHO

The TexLa TRC-funded **Project ECHO program** is an infrastructure for sharing knowledge, and it is designed to create virtual communities of learners by bringing together healthcare providers and subject-matter experts in a virtual space. Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits are issues for eligible participants, and the sessions serve to educate and bring issues to the forefront in telemedicine practice for various providers. Providers are also allowed to collaborate with external and internal partners in the pursuit of best practices.

1,322 Participants  
10 Sessions



medicine Program held an  
2024 to August 31, 2024, the  
s.

reach and Education

1,107

Outreach Contacts

reached 1,107 people through outreach and education initiatives.  
e conferences, workshops, and social media interactions.

## TOPICS COVERED

Osteoporosis and Falls – Unrecognized Disorder in the Adult Population • Advancing Diabetes Care: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Emerging Technologies • Statins • Advancing Obesity Care: Tools and Strategies for Better Patient Outcomes • Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH) • Infectious Agents and the Skin: A Dermatologic Detective Story • Dyspepsia Masquerading as Pancreatic Cancer • Long-Term Management of Kidney Transplant Recipients in the Community • Strategies That Rural Physicians Can Use to Improve Health Care Delivery for Underserved Populations • How to Evaluate Food Allergies

# NextGen 911

The **NextGen 911 Project** enables EMS teams in rural areas to stay connected with Level One Trauma Centers, even when they are more than 100 miles away. By using telemedicine, paramedics can talk directly with Emergency Department doctors about a patient's condition as it happens. This makes it easier to coordinate care and ensure that patients are sent to the correct treatment center.

## FY 2025 Accomplishments

- Designed and built portable EMS-ready telemedicine units
- Deployed telemedicine units to three participating sites, with more pending deployment
- Revised memorandum of understanding to be more user-friendly and provide a clearer definition to improve collaboration with rural EMS providers
- Developing a virtual course for EMS personnel focused on telehealth integration and best practices in rural and field-based care
- Revised criteria and protocols to support a more seamless telemedicine implementation
- Participating EMS sites to begin providing data based on the utilization of the telemedicine technology
- Provided training to rural EMS personnel and trauma centers
- Provided outreach efforts to rural emergency services, trauma centers, and other key stakeholders

## Community Engagement Team 2024-2025



**RANCE STANDRIDGE**  
*Technology Manager*



**MICHAEL MANGEL**  
*Broadband Program  
Manager*

**NEXTGEN\*911**

# Media, Analytics, Publishing, Research (MAPR) Team 2024-2025

The **Media, Analytics, Publishing, and Research (MAPR)** team is tasked with projects such as the Rural Health Quarterly, research data analysis, and producing this Annual Report. The team also develops interactive maps, design layouts for publications, handles FMHIRCH's web presence, and provides technical assistance.



**MIGUEL CARRASCO, MS**  
*Senior Director of Media, Analytics,  
Publishing, Research*



**JESSICA ALEXANDER**  
*Digital Designer*



**AMBER C. PARKER**  
*Lead Writer*



**GRACE FOSU, MA, MS**  
*Research Associate*



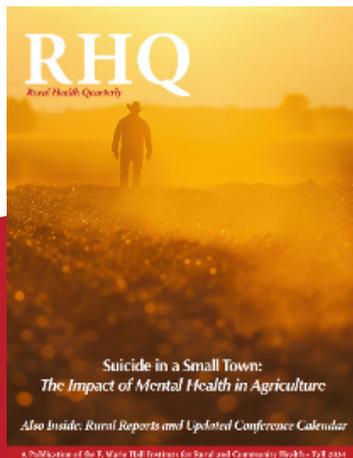
**DIANA VARGAS-GUTIERREZ, PH.D.**  
*Research Associate*



- F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health
- Texas H.O.T. Jobs
- TexLa Telehealth Resource Center
- *Rural Health Quarterly*
- West Texas Area Health Education Center
- ITDI

# Rural Health Quarterly (RHQ)

The *Rural Health Quarterly* is a scholarly publication that is administered, written, and published by the Institute. With articles covering rural communities, healthcare challenges, and rural health happenings around TTUHSC and West Texas, the RHQ is indexed on the Rural Health Information Hub and enjoys local as well as national prominence.



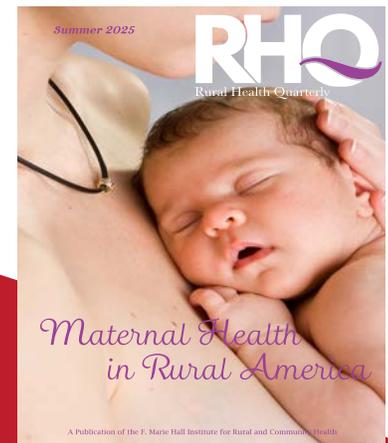
## FALL 2024

- Suicide in a Small Town: The Impact of Mental Health in Agriculture
- In Rural Texas, ERs are Facing a Growing Mental Health Crisis
- Rural Hospitals Built During Baby Boom Now Face Baby Bust
- Food Stamps Go Further in Rural Areas – Until You Add Transportation Costs



## WINTER 2025

- 2023 U.S. Rural Health Report Card



## SUMMER 2025

- Bridging the Rural-Urban Maternity Care Gap
- Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes
- Breastfeeding in the Texas Panhandle
- Care in the Fourth Trimester
- Doulas for Rural Mamas

# Rural Health Quarterly (RHQ)

## Advisory Board 2024-2025

The Rural Health Quarterly Advisory Board is instrumental in helping guide and shape our publication. The Board includes:

**Adrian Billings, MD, PhD**, is an associate professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC)-Permian Basin. In addition to his scholarly duties, Dr. Billings sees patients in Alpine, Marfa, and Presidio on a weekly basis.

**LaMicha Hogan, APRN, MSN, FNP-BC**, is the Managing Director of the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC). She is also an assistant professor at the TTUHSC School of Nursing.

**Amy Hord, LCSW**, is a behavioral health counselor at Family Support Services of Amarillo. Hord provides counseling services to adolescents and adults. Before this role, Hord worked as an Instructor of Social Work at West Texas A&M University in Canyon.

**Courtney Queen, PhD**, is the Associate Dean for Strategic Partnerships and Associate Professor at TTUHSC's Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health in Abilene. In 2020, Dr. Queen was selected as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar. As part of this award, Dr. Queen traveled to Latvia in Eastern Europe to teach at Riga Stradiņš University (RSU) and conduct research on health disparities and inequalities within the Latvian health care system.

**Bree Sherwin, PhD, JD**, is a law professor at the Texas Tech University School of Law. She also teaches Environmental Health in Texas Tech's Department of Public Health. Dr. Sherwin holds a PhD in Environmental Toxicology, with her research focusing on environmental health and environmental justice issues such as the Flint, Michigan water crisis and the environmental impact of coal ash waste ponds.



# Rural and Community Health **Senior Fellows**

## LaMicha Hogan, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC



**Dr. LaMicha Hogan**  
*Rural and Community Health Senior Fellow*

Dr. LaMicha Hogan is the Managing Director of the West Texas Area Health Education Center (AHEC). She is also a certified family nurse practitioner.

Before coming to the Division of Rural Affairs, Dr. Hogan served as the Associate Dean and Department Chair for Graduate Nursing Programs at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

Her long career also includes ten years in bedside critical care nursing, caring for individuals across the lifespan.

In the last year, Dr. Hogan's projects as a Rural and Community Health Senior Fellow focused on the role of nurses play in rural health, including:

- Identifying APRNs in rural health as champions in their communities for nursing and hospital systems
- Exploring shortages of nursing specialties (e.g., RNs and CRNAs in rural health areas)
- Pursuing behavioral health and maternal care HRSA Opportunities impacting rural health

Dr Hogan looks forward to working with nurse practitioners on how to develop rural relationships, and developing rural relationships to help improve rural communities and the people who call them home.

### Honors & Positions

- 2024-2025 South Plains Great 25 Nurses, President
- 2024-2025 Texas Nurse Practitioners University Ambassador for TTUHSC School of Nursing
- 2024-2025 Texas Nurse Practitioners, Legislative Ambassador, South Plains Region
- 2024-2025 National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties, Finance Committee, Member
- SON Graduate Program Council, Administrative Liaison
- SON Masters Program Council, Administrative Liaison
- SON PM DNP Program Council, Administrative Liaison
- SON Professional Development Council, Member
- SON Coordinating Council, Member
- SON Executive Leadership Council, Member

# Adrian Billings, MD, PhD, FAAFP, FACU

Dr. Adrian Billings, a native of rural Del Rio, has spent his entire clinical career working with the people of the Big Bend area of Texas. He says being a Senior Fellow of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health gives him a chance to bring health care to folks by advocating for improved access to care and improved rural health workforce. Dr. Billings says rural students hold the key to the rural health workforce challenges that we have. He calls them a worthy investment.

The two biggest predictors of a future rural medical practice for a medical student are: rural origins or rural life experiences and rural medicine exposure during medical school. Dr. Billings says he's dedicated to making sure these students have equal footing when it comes to achieving their dreams of becoming a clinician and increasing the exposure to rural experiences for TTUHSC trainees (nursing, medical, physical therapy, physician assistant, and resident physician). Among the activities he hosted in FY 2025, Dr. Billings collaborated with the AHEC program to host National Rural Health Day events in Odessa. He also joined forces with the Permian Basin AHEC, Midland College, Odessa College, Sul Ross State University, UTPB, and various schools of TTUHSC to host a Rural Health Careers Camp, a three-day event aimed at high school students interested in pursuing healthcare as a career.

In addition to serving as Faculty Mentor to more than a dozen students over the past year, Dr. Billings also serves as the founding Director of the TTUHSC-PB Alpine Rural Family Medicine Residency Program and the Medical Director of the Texas Family Medicine Preceptorship Program for the Texas Academy of Family Physicians (TAFP). He also serves as the current Treasurer for the TAFP. He also serves as Director for the Big Bend and Permian Basin Rural and Community Health elective and of the Rural and Community Health Engagement Special Topics program.

Dr. Billings also welcomes physician assistant students, medical students and residents in a clinical setting at the Preventative Care Health Services (PCHS), a Federally Qualified Health Center in Alpine, Presidio, and Marfa. He has many roles at PCHS, including Division Chief of the Alpine Rural Family Medicine Residency Program and Chief Medical Officer.

In the last year, Dr. Billings received recognition of his efforts in rural health, including as the Student's Choice for Outstanding Community Faculty Award from the TTUHSC-PB Department of Family and Community Medicine. He was also named to the Texas Monthly Texas Super Doctors list for November 2024 and July 2025.

Dr. Billings also serves as a school board trustee for the Alpine Independent School District.

## Honors & Positions

- National Health Service Corps Scholar alumnus
- Chief Medical Officer of Preventative Care Health Services FQHC in the rural Big Bend of Texas
- Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, and the Associate Academic Dean of Rural and Community Engagement at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
- Texas Monthly's Super Doctor, November 2024 & July 2025
- Elected school board trustee for the Alpine ISD
- Student's Choice for Outstanding Community Faculty Award TTUHSC-PB



**Dr. Adrian Billings**  
*Rural and Community Health Senior Fellow*

# Grants, Applications, and Awards

The Division of Rural Affairs, including the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health and the Institute for Telehealth and Digital Innovation, has a wide array of strategic partnerships that present our contractual needs. Over the course of fiscal year **2025**, The Division managed a total of 28 contracts to support its numerous strategic partnerships.

These partnerships include internal agreements with other departments throughout TTUHSC such as the School of Medicine, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health, and the Department of Internal Medicine.

Through these strategic partnerships, the Division expanded its mission to collaborate with the people of Texas for the advancement of health through innovative and scholarly research, the advanced use of technology, comprehensive education, and outreach.

Through its contract management and strategic partnerships, the Division of Rural Affairs embodies the Institutional vision of transforming health care through innovation and collaboration.

GRANT	START DATE	END DATE	TOTAL
Model State-Supported AHEC (HRSA)	September 1, 2022	August 31, 2025	\$ 2,818,086
Telehealth Resource Center Grant Program	September 1, 2021	August 31, 2025	\$ 1,364,750
Health Equity Grant	November 10, 2021	March 24, 2025	\$ 818,986
Next Generation 911	September 1, 2023	August 31, 2025	\$ 500,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$5,501,822</b>

# Funding for 2024–2025

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## ENDOWMENTS

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The F. Marie Hall Chair in Rural Health	\$419,458
Smith/Vela/Patterson Senior Fellowship for Rural Health Research	\$252,967
F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health	\$1,595,397
Total	\$2,267,822

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## STATE-APPROPRIATED, LINE-ITEM FUNDING

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Rural Health Care	\$673,058
West Texas AHEC Program	\$1,732,800
Institute for Telehealth Technology and Innovation	\$5,000,000
Total	\$7,405,858

# Institute for Telehealth and Digital Innovation (ITDI)

ITDI reached an estimated 2,600+ individuals through outreach and education efforts, including workshops, conferences, and initiatives. This includes more than 1,700 Texans screened through the Access to Breast Care for Texans initiative, as well as participation in major conferences such as the ATA in Phoenix, the Rural Nursing Organization Conference, and the Nurse Practitioner Conference.



# ITDI Team



ITDI Staff 2024-2025



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

Institute of Telehealth and  
Digital Innovation

# Access to **Breast Health**

One of the most exciting initiatives this year has been **Access to Breast Health for Texans (ABHT)**. Through a partnership with the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health, we introduced Bexa, a portable and radiation-free breast screening device. This technology has allowed us to bring exams directly into rural communities and other underserved areas where women often go without preventive care.

As of August 2025, **more than 1,700 women were screened**, many for the very first time. Women who needed follow-up care were able to connect with providers. The results from this first year make it clear how powerful this program can be. Because of that, we are preparing to expand ABHT into other parts of Texas. The next phase will focus on underserved regions where access to breast health services is especially limited, with the goal of building a model that can eventually reach women across the entire state.



# Campus Health **Connect**



Our school-based telehealth program, **Campus Health Connect**, has also grown significantly. This year, we expanded into 21 schools throughout the Permian Basin. In partnership with the School of Medicine, Odessa Campus, and with Dr. Martin Ortega and Dr. Adrian Billings serving as physician champions, this program offers students access to a healthcare provider right from their school nurse's office.

Campus Health Connect services are available for just \$20 for each visit. All children up to age 18 can be seen for non-emergent physical and mental health needs during school hours. The program works to make healthcare easier to access, bring communities together, lower costs for families, keep students in school, and support the well-being of both students and parents. By connecting schools with healthcare, families are already finding it easier to handle everyday health needs.

# Remote Patient **Monitoring**

ITDI also continued its partnership with the School of Medicine to advance its **Remote Patient Monitoring** program. Patients enrolled in this program use devices at home, such as blood pressure cuffs and scales, that send data to a care team in real time. Nurses and physicians can step in quickly if they see something concerning, preventing complications and reducing unnecessary hospital visits. For patients managing chronic conditions, this level of support is life-changing. The School of Medicine recently completed the request for proposal (RFP) process to select a new remote patient monitoring vendor. This will allow the program to scale more effectively and provide improved care for patients.

## Telepsychiatry **Initiative**

Another exciting project aims to help ease the overwhelming challenges that rural emergency rooms face when addressing behavioral health crises. In collaboration with the Office of Strategic Initiatives, the **Telepsychiatry Initiative** gives rural hospitals access to on-demand psychiatric consultations delivered through telehealth. This has already provided critical support to both patients and hospital staff, reducing transfers and ensuring that individuals in crisis can receive timely, specialized care closer to home. The pilot site in Mt. Pleasant laid the groundwork for broader expansion, and rural hospitals across the state have already expressed interest in joining.

# Rural Clinic Partnership **with Texas A&M**

The less than 2,000 people who call Jeff Davis County home now have a place for health care thanks to a partnership between Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and Texas A&M University Health Science Center. But what makes this facility different is that it's a 40-foot shipping container that's been retro-fitted to be a medical clinic.

Members of the Division of Rural Affairs, including those from the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Affairs and the Institute for Telemedicine and Digital Innovation, were on hand for the ribbon-cutting for the new clinic.

Without the clinic in their county, people in Fort Davis had to drive to Alpine, which is about 22 miles away, for general medical care.

Health professionals from TTUHSC and TAMU will offer services through telemedicine. Counselors from the Texas A&M Health Telehealth Institute will provide tele-counseling services, while TTUHSC family medicine doctors and medical residents based at Texas Tech Physicians in Odessa will provide telemedicine services.

## Healthy **Communities**

**Healthy Communities** is another ITDI-supported project. This program began in Crane, Texas, following the first-ever door-to-door health survey we conducted there. The survey uncovered high rates of undiagnosed diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic health issues. The Crane experience has given us a blueprint for how to understand and respond to rural health needs in a way that respects community voices and builds local trust. It is already being looked at as a model for future rural health assessments in other towns. The Healthy Communities program is actively working on phase two, which includes additional health tracking and interventions.

# Offices/Boards/Committees

## **Kelly Alvarez**

Governance Committee, National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers  
Healthcare Opportunities Committee, National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers  
Workforce Development Committee, National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers  
Telehealth Implementation Bootcamp Planning Committee  
Rural Health Transformation Program Information Hub, National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health  
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, Member  
American Telemedicine Association, Member

## **Wendy Bryan**

National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA), Member

## **Tanya Easterwood**

Staff Senate

## **Grace Fosu, MA, MS**

Values Culture Ambassador, TTUHSC

## **Smiley Garcia, MPA**

Texas Broadband Development Office's Digital Opportunity Advisory Group, Member  
Advisory Board for the Master of Public Administration Program at Texas Tech University, Board Member  
Texas Military and Veterans Alumni Network (MVN), Texas Tech University Alumni Association, Board Member  
TTUHSC's Veterans Advisory Committee, Board Member  
External Affairs Standing Council, Member

## **LaMicha Hogan, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC**

2024-2025 South Plains Great 25 Nurses, President  
2024-2025 Texas Nurse Practitioners University Ambassador for TTUHSC School of Nursing  
2024-2025 Texas Nurse Practitioners, Legislative Ambassador, South Plains Region  
2024-2025 National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties, Finance Committee, Member  
TTUHSC External Affairs Committee, Supporting Member  
SON Graduate Program Council, Administrative Liaison  
SON Masters Program Council, Administrative Liaison  
SON PM DNP Program Council, Administrative Liaison  
SON Professional Development Council, Member  
SON Coordinating Council, Member  
SON Executive Leadership Council, Member

## **Catherine Hudson, DrPH, MPH**

Society of Clinical Research Associates, President  
TTUHSC Hispanic-Serving Institution Committee, Member

## **Jesse Jenkins**

Member, National AHEC Organization (NAO)  
Member, NAO CORE Committee  
Mentor, NAO National Membership Program

## **Coleman Johnson, JD**

Plainview Foundation for Rural Health Advancement, Board Member  
Texas Health Improvement Network, Member  
Telehealth Child Mental Health Care Consortium, Executive Committee  
Inns of Court, Lubbock Chapter, Barrister

## **Sarah Looten**

External Affairs Council

## **Denise Lopez**

National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA), Member  
National Rural Health Association, Member

## **Dolores Parrish**

Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), Member  
TTUHSC Latin/Hispanic Faculty/Staff Association, Member

## **Billy U. Philips, PhD, MPH**

Grover E. Murray Professor, TTUHSC Plainview Foundation for Rural Health Advancement, Board Member  
Advisory Council of the Texas Health Improvement Network (THIN), Board Member  
National AHEC Organization Advisory Board, Member  
Texas Rural Health Association, Member  
National Rural Health Association, Member  
School of Medicine Admissions Committee, Member  
Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions, Senior Fellow

## **Julie Wright, MSN, RN**

March of Dimes, Maternal Infant Health Initiative, West Texas, MIH Subcommittee Member  
Texas Nurses Association (TNA) - Health Information Technology (HIT), Committee Member  
South Plains Great 25 Nurses, Treasurer  
TTUHSC School of Nursing Advisory Council, Lubbock, Co-Chair  
External Affairs Council, Supporting Member  
Capital Day Planning Committee, Member

# Division of Rural Affairs



*Division of Rural Affairs Staff 2024-2025*



Division of **RURAL AFFAIRS**

*"We focus our imagination, our talents and our energy to improve the health and well-being of the people and communities of Texas and beyond."*

## Contact Us

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