

# ND awarded \$199M for Rural Health Transformation Program to strengthen care in rural communities

Recently, Gov. Kelly Armstrong announced that North Dakota has been awarded \$199 million from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to support the first year of a statewide Rural Health Transformation Program. The funding will strengthen rural health care by improving access, quality and health outcomes for North Dakotans in rural communities over the next five years.

To accept federal funding, North Dakota lawmakers must appropriate it before it can be spent. Armstrong issued an executive order today officially convening the Legislature for a special session starting Jan. 21.

"With this major investment through the Rural Health Transformation Program, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink and reshape how health care is delivered to our rural communities," Armstrong said. "We thank President Trump, HHS Secretary

Kennedy, CMS Administrator Oz and our congressional delegation for their support in securing this funding, which will benefit citizens across our state and help make North Dakota the best place to live, work and raise a family."

The state submitted its application to CMS on Nov. 3. The Rural Health Transformation Program centers on four strategic initiatives:

Strengthening and stabilizing the rural health workforce.

Making North Dakota healthy again with preventive care and healthy eating.

Bringing high-quality health care closer to home.

Connecting technology, data and providers for a stronger North Dakota.

"This funding allows North Dakota to build on existing partnerships and invest in long-term solutions to move toward making our state the healthiest in the nation," said Pat Traynor, commissioner for North Dakota Health and Hu-

man Services (HHS). "Rural communities face unique challenges, and this program helps ensure people can get the care they need, close to home."

As part of the application, the state also submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food waiver to limit purchases of unhealthy food and help improve health outcomes for North Dakotans who participate in SNAP. The USDA approved the waiver on Dec. 10, making North Dakota eligible for additional funding beyond the \$500 million minimum allocated to each state over the five-year period.

Leading up to the special legislative session, HHS is establishing a framework for grant funding prioritization, distribution and sustainability, compliance monitoring in alignment with federal guidance and stakeholder engagement. HHS expects the first release of sub-

award grant opportunities in the first quarter of 2026.

"Being awarded this grant funding is an important milestone," said Sarah Aker, HHS medical services executive director. "Now, our focus shifts to implementation so the resources can start making an impact in rural communities."

The Rural Health Transformation Program was part of the federal Working Families Tax Cut Act, which appropriated \$50 billion over five years, with half allocated equally to all states. The other half was awarded to states based on their applications and metrics that show where the funding can make the most significant health impact in rural communities.

To learn more about the Rural Health Transformation Program, including signing up to receive program notifications, visit [hhs.nd.gov/rural-health-transformation](http://hhs.nd.gov/rural-health-transformation).

## NDIT set to finish Statewide Interoperable Radio Network by 2027

North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT) is proud to announce that the Statewide Interoperable Radio Network (SIRN) project is on track for completion in 2027.

This milestone means police officers, firefighters, EMS, and other first responders across the state will soon benefit from a unified, encrypted, and reliable radio communication network—empowering them with secure, instant connectivity no matter where emergencies strike.

### Prioritizing public safety with reliability and reach

For years, North Dakota's first responders have relied on aging radios and systems that have, at times, limited their ability to communicate during critical moments. SIRN (pronounced "siren")—made possible through \$120 million in legislative funding and comprehensive statewide planning—is modernizing public safety communications

by creating a shared radio network that spans the entire state. Once fully deployed, the network will support more than 900 departments and include 140 tower sites operating on the robust 800 MHz frequency.

"This project represents a historic leap forward for public safety in North Dakota," said Craig Felchle, NDIT Chief Technology Officer. "By upgrading to a secure, interoperable system, we're ensuring that first responders can talk to one another instantly and reliably—whether they're across town or across the state. Our progress toward the finish line shows our commitment to delivering modern, life-saving technology that supports our communities."

The phased rollout began with a handful of counties and continues to expand steadily. Every tower site is designed with hardened infrastructure and backup power to maintain operations during natural disas-

ters, ensuring dependable communication even in extreme conditions.

### Building a network from firsthand experience

Jared Lemieux, SIRN Administrator and former sergeant for the Burleigh County Sheriff's Department, reflects on his firsthand experience using the network: "Having used SIRN on the ground, I can say this system makes a real difference. The clarity, speed, and security of the communications allow first responders to coordinate quickly and efficiently, which is critical when lives are on the line. It's reassuring to know that soon, every emergency responder across North Dakota will have access to this lifesaving technology."

SIRN's adoption of APCO Project 25 (P25) standards and trunked radio technology—essentially providing a shared technical language and enabling automatic channel as-

signments—ensures interoperability not only within agencies but also between local, state, and federal partners.

Initial guidance and training are being provided to support a smooth transition for all entities, including rural and volunteer departments. Lt. Michael Hanel of the Dickinson Police Department is also seeing firsthand how the transition is making an impact.

"We were eager to be early adopters of SIRN within the city and county, and we have been thoroughly impressed with the system since going live," Hanel said. "It allows for seamless communication between different emergency service disciplines, ensuing clear and concise connections during multi-jurisdictional events. Responders have reported crystal-clear communication in areas that very high frequency (VHF) systems lacked."

These firsthand accounts un-

derscore the transformative impact of SIRN, but the story doesn't end there. As more communities come online, the benefits of unified, reliable communication are becoming increasingly evident across the state.

"As we move toward the completion of SIRN, we're not just building a network—we're strengthening the foundation of public safety in every North Dakota community," said Corey Mock, Chief Information Officer for the State of North Dakota. "Public safety is one of Governor Kelly Armstrong's key priorities, and this project reflects what's possible when technology, teamwork, and vision come together for the greater good. We're proud of the progress made and excited for the future we're creating, one where every responder has the tools they need to protect and serve with confidence."

## Armstrong statement on arrest of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro

On Monday, Jan. 5, Gov. Kelly Armstrong issued the following statement regarding the arrest of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro.

"Taking a brutal dictator like Nicolás Maduro off the board makes the United States, the west-

ern hemisphere and the world a safer place," Armstrong said. "President Trump was right to remove this illegitimate leader who stole an election and partnered with a cartel to flood U.S. streets with narcotics that cost American lives – leading to a federal indictment for narco-terrorism more than five years ago. Our military members deserve our deepest thanks for their incredible courage and precision in carrying out this complex mission and bringing Maduro to justice."

### CORRECTION

In last week's edition of the newspaper, we published that three Griggs County commissioners met with Foster County commissioners. We were informed that

## District 29 Democratic-NPL to hold meetings

District 29 Democratic-NPL will have two planning meetings in January ahead of the nominating convention in February.

District Democratic NPL will meet at the Carrington Pizza Ranch on Saturday, Jan. 24, at 1 p.m. to discuss and plan the legislative campaigns for 2026. The District Democratic NPL will have a second planning meeting at the Cooperstown Pizza Ranch on Sunday, Jan. 25, at 1 p.m.

District 29 Democratic-NPL will hold its district nominating convention on Sunday, Feb. 1, in the Pekin Community Center at 2 p.m. Delegates will be selected for the state convention in Bismarck and endorse candidates for

the N.D. House of Representatives and N.D. Senate. State Legislators will hold a four-year term in office, serving in the legislative sessions in 2027 and 2029.

The state Democratic NPL will have its state convention at Bismarck State College on March 7-8, to nominate candidates for Attorney General, Agriculture, Public Service Commission, Tax Commissioner, Secretary of State and U.S. Congress.

Legislative District 29 is made up of Griggs, Nelson, Steele, Foster and rural Stutsman Counties. The cities include Lakota, Finley, Cooperstown, Carrington and Medina.

Any questions, reach out to District Chair Ben Vig of Sharon, 701-789-0605.