



*Governor Nathan Deal*  
Office of the Governor



For immediate release  
Feb. 23, 2015

Office of Communications  
(404) 651-7774

## Deal releases Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee report

*Immediate action to be taken in order to meet the needs of rural hospitals across state, governor says*

Gov. Nathan Deal today released the [final report](#) of recommendations from his Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee, which was created last April to identify and provide solutions for the needs of Georgia's rural hospital community.

"When a rural hospital struggles, a community struggles," said Deal. "Back in April we stood at a critical juncture for some of our state's rural health care systems, and this committee was just one of the paths taken to ensure that Georgians, no matter where they live, have the ability to receive adequate care. These recommendations, a result of countless hours of dedicated analysis and review of a system that affects not only our citizens' wellbeing, but also our local economies, will serve as a strong starting point toward providing high-quality health care throughout rural Georgia."

Included in the recommendations is the establishment of a four-site pilot program, based upon an integrated "hub and spoke" model, to relieve cost pressures on emergency departments and ensure that the best, most efficient treatment is received by patients. The program aims to increase the utilization of new and existing technology and infrastructure in smaller critical access hospitals, Wi-Fi and telemedicine equipped ambulances, telemedicine equipped school clinics, federally qualified health centers, public health departments and local physicians. The four proposed hubs of initial implementation are Union General, Appling Health System, Crisp Regional and Emanuel Regional Medical Center.

"Just as a medical emergency can't wait, neither can we wait to act upon these recommendations," said Deal. "An additional \$3 million will be allocated in this year's budget to the State Office of Rural Health within the Georgia Department of Community Health to fund the necessary tools the four hubs need to effectively implement this pilot program. It is my hope that these efforts are not a temporary fix, but rather the beginning of a long-lasting road to recovery for our rural health systems."

The committee, which included health care professionals, legislators, local officials and business owners, also recommended the maintenance of existing Certificate of Need laws to protect existing rural hospital infrastructure. Other legislative fixes include the expansion of the scope of practice for midlevel providers, such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants, who could help bolster health care resources in rural communities.

“First of all, I want to thank the governor for listening to my concerns about the plight of rural hospitals and health care in rural Georgia and for creating this committee,” said Committee Co-Chair and state Sen. David Lucas. “Since April, we have worked to put together meaningful solutions to address these needs. On behalf of the entire Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee, I thank the Governor Deal and his staff for instituting programs to start the process of trying to address health care in rural Georgia.”

“The Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee tasked by Governor Deal has worked hard to achieve our goal of identifying and providing solutions for our state’s most challenging rural health care needs,” said Committee Co-Chair and state Rep. Terry England. “Together, with the support of the General Assembly, the Governor’s Office and state agencies, we are committed through these recommendations to improve our rural hospitals, and by extension, the quality of life of all Georgia citizens.”

Brian Robinson  
[brobinson@georgia.gov](mailto:brobinson@georgia.gov)

Merry Hunter Hipp  
[mhhipp@georgia.gov](mailto:mhhipp@georgia.gov)