

# PROVIDER AVAILABILITY STRATEGY OVERVIEW



T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION  
EST. 1962  
BUILDING A THRIVING RURAL EAST TEXAS

## OBJECTIVE

The supply of primary care providers, dentists, and other high need health occupations in East Texas is increased.

## CHALLENGE

There is a shortage of healthcare providers across the country, but rural areas are especially impacted. The federal government projects a shortage of more than 20,000 primary care physicians in rural areas by 2025.<sup>1</sup> The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) estimates that approximately 10,000 additional dental practitioners are needed to meet the current need for dental care in 6,300 mostly rural communities.<sup>2</sup> This inadequate supply of primary care providers, dentists, and other provider types has plagued East Texas for decades. According to HRSA, all Texas counties in the foundation's service area are health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) for primary care, 19 counties are HPSAs for dental care, and all counties with the exception of Harris are HPSAs for mental health care.<sup>3</sup> Provider-to-patient ratios for primary care are three times the U.S. average and 19 of the foundation's rural counties have worse ratios than the state average.<sup>4</sup> One reason rural areas lack primary care physicians is that physicians usually choose to live in the area where they complete their residencies. With 99 percent of residencies located in urban or suburban areas, it is no surprise that rural areas are faced with physician shortages.<sup>5</sup>

When people do not have consistent access to a primary care provider, conditions such as depression, and early signs of cancer or chronic disease may go undetected and untreated potentially leading to premature death. Patients routinely seen by a primary care provider have a 19 percent lower chance of premature death than those who only see specialists for their care.<sup>6</sup> A lack of dental care can also lead to poor health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, dementia, respiratory infections, and diabetic complications.<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that without adequate access to health care, rural East Texans will struggle with their health, have less opportunities, and contribute less to building thriving communities.

## OPPORTUNITY

Although the lack of primary care providers is disheartening, there are reasons for optimism in a few areas. Sam Houston State University (SHSU) launched a College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2020 with a focus on addressing the shortage of primary care physicians in rural East Texas. Osteopathic physicians tend to choose primary care

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6140198/#b3-ms114\\_p0363](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6140198/#b3-ms114_p0363)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.agd.org/constituent/news/2020/07/06/demand-for-dentists-forecasting-the-future-of-the-profession>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

<sup>4</sup> [https://download.cms.gov/nppes/NPL\\_Files.html](https://download.cms.gov/nppes/NPL_Files.html)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6140198/#b5-ms114\\_p0363](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6140198/#b5-ms114_p0363)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/\\_\\_\\_media\\_files\\_publications\\_health\\_reform\\_and\\_you\\_health\\_reform\\_primary\\_care\\_612.pdf](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/___media_files_publications_health_reform_and_you_health_reform_primary_care_612.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/gum-disease/how-poor-dental-care-can-affect-your-overall-health>

tracts and are more likely to practice in rural locations.<sup>8</sup> In early 2020, the University of Texas System announced it would establish a medical school in Tyler to increase access to care in the East Texas region. Additionally, for new physicians and dentists who are not interested in starting an independent practice, rural East Texas has a number of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) which are regularly looking to hire primary care physicians and dentists. Physicians and dentists who work in a clinic have the advantages of an established patient base, reduced administrative responsibilities, and no up-front investment in starting their own practice.

## STRATEGY

The foundation seeks to increase the number of primary care providers, dentists, and other providers in rural East Texas by working with partners such as medical schools, dental schools, hospitals, and clinics to establish rural residency programs and provide incentives to practice in our most underserved areas. These incentives include medical education student loan repayment programs, hiring incentives, and support to begin a practice within a clinic setting in an HPSA.

## FOCUS AREAS

- **Rural Residency Programs:** Establish and fund rural residency programs in health professional shortage areas.
  - Fund feasibility studies to determine if a GME program is possible at selected locations
  - Fund planning grants and trainings for hospitals/clinics to prepare for residency programs
  - Fund residency programs
  - Fund infrastructure within hospitals and clinics to support residency programs
- **Hiring Incentives:** Create and fund incentive programs for clinics to recruit primary care providers, dentists and other providers.
  - Establish and fund incentive programs
- **Support to Enter Practice:** Support efforts to recruit new physicians and dentists to rural East Texas.
  - Create, fund, and promote loan repayment programs with medical schools and dental schools
  - Fund clinic on-boarding costs such as credentialing, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) registration, Medicaid and Medicare certification for providers to ensure transition into practice in rural East Texas

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<sup>8</sup> <https://jaoa.org/article.aspx?articleid=2093278>

## MONITORING PROGRESS

To determine the success of our strategies and efforts we will:

- Monitor the number of primary care providers, dentists, and other providers practicing within our service area each year
- Monitor the number of applicants for rural residency, those transitioning into practice in our service area, and those retained
- Review the rankings of the foundation's counties in the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps
- Review HPSA status within our service area.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about T.L.L. Temple Foundation or about this strategy, please refer to our website <insert address to home page or to full strategic plan or to education strategy> or contact <insert program officers names and contact info>.

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