

What is a Rural Health Network?

From the HRSA (Health Resources and Services Administration) website:

A rural health network is a collaboration among rural health care providers that pool resources and identify means to achieve common goals and objectives. A rural health network usually includes at least one rural hospital and links two or more autonomous organizations. The connections among the parties may or may not be based on formal agreements.

The characteristics of the network in terms of governance, complexity, and scope of objectives also differ among networks. The shared functions of the network depend on the nature of the rural health network. Some popular functions include: pooling financial resources to support network ventures (including health IT), supporting common legislative and regulatory advocacy activities, and developing continuing education programs.

A rural health network may be described as being either horizontal or vertical. Horizontal networks consist of similar types of organizations that serve similar markets, such as an all-hospital network or an all-community center network. Vertical networks are comprised of organizations from different classes or with purposes that may or may not serve the same geographical area. For example, members of a given vertical health network may include a hospital, an ambulatory care provider, a public health unit, ambulance system, and a nursing home.

<http://www.hrsa.gov/healthit/toolbox/RuralHealthITtoolbox/Collaboration/whatisnetwork.html>

What did we say our Rural Health Network would be and do?

Three northern California health care organizations, Redwood Coast Medical Services, Coast Life Support District, and Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital are collaborating to form a vertical healthcare network, the **Mendonoma Health Alliance (MHA)**. This integrated network will establish an infrastructure to expand access, coordinate, and improve the quality of healthcare services.

Our goal is to improve population health in our service area by creating a strategic plan that identifies and prioritizes the necessary steps to improve collaboration and coordination of health care, wellness, and prevention services.

More specifically, what did we say our focus would be?

The focus of this year-long effort to form a sustainable and functioning network for the future will include:

1. Create a network infrastructure.

(For example: execute an MOU and bylaws, agree on defined roles/responsibilities, establish a new entity-501(c)3).

2. Develop a long-term, fiscally responsible plan to create an ambulatory practice of the future.

(For example; increase access to specialty care, implement telemedicine, expand urgent care services, construction of new/expanded ACC, implement/support school health & wellness programs, aging in place, opioid abuse, alternative medicine)

3. Develop a regional transitional care coordination program to improve patient health outcomes as they transition from the hospital back to their primary care provider.

(For example, chronic disease management, communication across the continuum of care, home care, hospice)

4. Enhance the existing Health Information Exchange (HIE) to provide electronic transmission of patient's health records across multiple settings.

(For example, electronic health record interoperability, imaging services)

How will we accomplish this?

Over the next twelve months, the MHA will:

- Convene regular meetings of the members and key stakeholders to conduct strategic planning; *(includes 4 1½ day long strategic planning sessions – 2 on the coast, 2 in SR)*
- Convene at least two community forums to ensure the broadest possible input and participation from residents and from other stakeholders who are not formal network members;
- Update the existing community needs assessment to reflect significant recent changes and further anticipated changes in the area's health delivery system;
- Develop a strategic plan to identify ways to achieve better system efficiencies and improve health services in our region;
- Communicate the results of the assessment and planning process to key local, state and national stakeholders;
- Identify and seek potential federal, state and private funding to implement the strategic plan, including, potentially, a HRSA Rural Health Network Development implementation grant *(due late November 2016)*.