

## **How Can Rural Health Systems Help Lift a County out of Persistent Poverty?**

Principal investigator: Dr. Mark Woodring, Center for Rural Health, [mark.woodring@okstate.edu](mailto:mark.woodring@okstate.edu)

Collaborators: Dr. Brian Whitacre, Agricultural Economics; Dr. Dave Shideler, Heartland Forward; Lara Brooks, Rural Health, Center for Health Sciences

Health care contributes to a higher quality of life and employment opportunities in rural communities. Tillman County recently lost its hospital, and Harmon County ranks near the bottom of the state for “Clinical Care” outcomes, particularly preventable hospital stays, uninsured populations and access to primary care providers. Both counties are seeing substantial job and population losses. This project seeks to test new health care delivery models such as repurposing the recently closed hospital in Tillman County and creating a Health ExtensionPLUS collaboration emphasizing the strengths of the existing providers in both counties along with key university outreach assets. This project will explore creative new models for integrating and reinvigorating existing health care and Extension resources in impoverished rural communities.

Specific aims include:

- Determining the feasibility of alternative models for emergency services and health-related Extension (telehealth, dietary and nutrition, etc.) aid for rural communities following a hospital closure; and
- Evaluating how these alternatives form different linkages within the local economy compared to prior hospital-focused models.

Learning more about the current status of and the opportunities for improvements in rural health systems and economic conditions in Harmon and Tillman Counties is expected to benefit the community. This research will also clarify characteristics affecting the feasibility of emerging health care models and their connectivity to the local economy.