

Eligibility of the Rural Health Education Building

For ARPA Funding

UNK Report to the Executive Board of the Legislative Council

July 1, 2022

The Nebraska Unicameral has provided \$60 million to plan and construct a Rural Health Education Building on the campus of the University of Nebraska at Kearney. This building will house programming that prepares future healthcare workers who will serve in rural Nebraska, including doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and allied health professionals.

The project is a strategic, targeted approach to the COVID-19 Public Health Response. Currently, the shortage of health care professionals in rural Nebraska reduces access to medical care. In communities that do not have healthcare workers—for example, 14 Nebraska counties do not have a primary care physician—residents are less likely to get appropriate medical care. This occurs at clinics for outpatient visits, and it occurs at hospitals that are so understaffed that they transfer and turn away patients when they cannot care for them. In addition to doctors, this includes physician assistants, pharmacists, mental health care professionals, and more. Prevention and mitigation of COVID-19, along with the broad range of other health issues, will be significantly strengthened when the Rural Health Education Building begins graduating new professionals committed to serving in rural communities.

This project is a strategic response to the Negative Economic Impact of the pandemic. Communities without appropriate healthcare workforce suffer economic leakage every time an individual goes to a different community for healthcare. This situation has been aggravated by the pandemic, because the stress placed on rural clinics and hospitals is causing a high number of retirements and workforce departures. Economic sustainability is now closely linked to healthcare workforce. This impacts doctors offices, pharmacies, clinics, not for profit organizations, hospitals, and the public sector health agencies. And it impacts the individual patients who would have to pay travel costs on top of medical care if they travel to other communities.

This project will mitigate ongoing impacts of the pandemic, it will increase public access to health care, and it will foster community economic sustainability. UNK and the University of Nebraska will fully comply with policies and regulations promulgated by state and federal legislatures and agencies.