



ARKANSAS HOSPITALS

Winter 2025

RURAL HEALTH'S RIPPLE EFFECTS

SPECIAL SECTION
Annual Meeting Recap



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Addressing the Challenges of Healthcare in Rural America

By Kay Kendall

If you work in a hospital in rural America, I don't have to tell you about the challenges. And they seem to be getting harder and harder. Increasing capitation. Difficulty in recruiting physicians and nurses. Limited access to specialists. And aging populations with increasing comorbidities.

And the challenges in rural settings extend beyond healthcare: rising costs for groceries, gasoline, and other common needs. Declining performance across the education system. Erosion of a once-stable foundation to ensure a high quality of life. So many reflected in the social determinants of health. Each of these challenges is daunting in and of itself, but in combination may seem to be overwhelming.

Compounding the issues is the tendency to try to address them in a vacuum, as though they have no relationship to each other when, in fact, they are frequently interrelated.

What if there were a holistic framework that brings together key partners in improving multiple facets at once? This can often be summed up in the saying, "A rising tide lifts all boats." And is there irrefutable evidence that such a framework exists and has provided untold results to the

communities that use it? There is such a model that applies to inner cities and rural areas both. It's based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, and it's called, Communities of Resilience and Excellence® 2026.

Since 2015, more than 35 communities across the country have engaged in Communities of Excellence (its original name until 2025 when it became Communities of Resilience and Excellence). Together, they're building a movement for resilient, equitable, high-performing communities.



This model brings multiple community partners to the table in areas key to the quality of life and assesses progress via a Common Community Scorecard with the measures shown below.

	Economy	Median Household Income
	Education	High School Completion
	Health	General Health Status
	Social Connections	Adults with 14+ "Not Good" Mental Health Days Per Month
	Natural Environment	Air Quality
	Built Environment	Broadband Access
	Housing	Severe Housing Problems

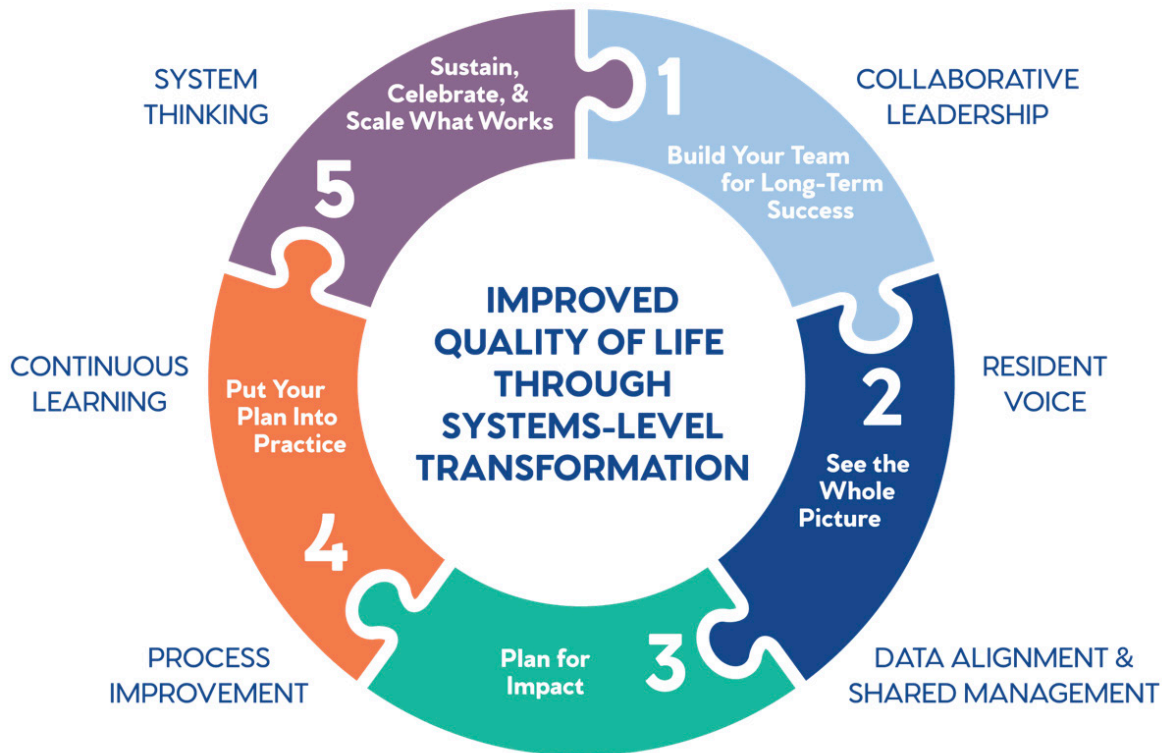
Are these measures of importance to you and your rural community? Would you like to explore options of how you could use the resources available through Communities of Resilience and Excellence® 2026.

The Impact Pathway is a guided journey designed to help cross-sector community teams make measurable progress on shared priorities. Rooted in systems thinking and built on the Baldrige-inspired C.O.R.E. Guide (formerly the Communities of Excellence Framework), the pathway provides the structure, tools, and support your team needs to align people, data, strategy, and action — step by step.

The pathway guides communities through five proven milestones rooted in systems thinking and data-driven collaboration.

Communities of Resilience & Excellence

Impact Pathway The Five Milestones



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Learn more about this Baldrige-based framework adapted specifically to apply to communities rather than a single, stand-alone organization. And learn how it could help your community in improving healthcare, education, infrastructure, and more.

Scan the QR code to visit communitiesofexcellence2026.org/what-we-do/impact-pathway/impact-pathway-interest-form.html ➦



The team at BaldrigeCoach would be glad to help guide your hospital's quest for process improvement. As CEO and Principal of BaldrigeCoach, **Kay Kendall** coaches organizations on their paths to performance excellence using the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria as a framework. Her team, working with health care and other organizations, has mentored 25 National Quality Award recipients. In each edition of Arkansas Hospitals, Kay offers readers quality improvement tips from her coaching playbook. Contact Kay at 972.489.3611 or Kay@Baldrige-Coach.com.