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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Missouri Rural Health Association Donation from Aetna to Advance EMS Training for High-Risk Maternal and Newborn Care**

JEFFERSON CITY, MO, April 20, 2026 – The Missouri Rural Health Association (MRHA) has received a \$150,000 donation from Aetna to lead a statewide initiative in partnership with the Sho-Me MIH Network® to improve Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response and outcomes for high-risk obstetric (HROB) patients and critically ill newborns in rural and other areas of the state with medically underserved populations.

The *EMS High Risk OB Training Initiative* will provide in-depth training for EMS clinicians in assessing preventative maternal healthcare, emergent HROB, emergent post-delivery care, and emergent neonatal resuscitation needs, as well as simulation training that encompasses high-risk and low-frequency scenarios that are likely to be experienced in the field. This training is necessary for both emergency medical services (reactive) and mobile integrated healthcare (proactive) clinicians. In addition, clinicians will receive training and skill development in caring for the critically ill, post-delivery mother and newborn during the post-delivery phase and transport to ensure the best possible outcomes for both mother and baby.

“Too many rural Missourians face significant barriers to timely care,” said Heidi Lucas, executive director of the Missouri Rural Health Association. “By strengthening training, coordination, and access to specialized resources, we are improving the quality of care delivered in the moments that matter most for mothers and infants across Missouri.”

As reported by the March of Dimes in their 2023 report, *Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care Deserts and the Crisis of Access and Equity*, Missouri's maternal health outcomes continue to lag behind the national average, with nearly 42% of all Missouri counties considered maternity care deserts.<sup>1</sup> More than 10% of Missouri's women live more than a 30-minute drive from a birthing hospital and 15% receive inadequate prenatal care. Approximately 7,000 OB/GYN calls annually are made to EMS clinicians, and over 250 births annually are made in the field, including in high-acuity, resource-limited situations.

#### **The initiative will:**

- Train approximately 250 EMS and Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) clinicians in high-risk obstetric and critical newborn care
- Deliver six regional training events in high-need areas, including rural communities, and two training events at statewide EMS conferences
- Develop standardized curriculum, simulation-based training, and readiness assessments
- Implement a statewide “readiness leveling” model to strengthen EMS capabilities
- Expand telehealth connections to OB, pediatric, and specialty providers for follow-up care

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The support from Aetna is part of its commitment to strengthening rural health systems and improving maternal and child health outcomes.

“A person’s ZIP code should never determine the quality or safety of care she receives,” said Lisa Baird, CEO of Aetna Better Health of Missouri. “By investing in advanced EMS training and readiness across the state, we’re helping build a stronger, more responsive system of care—especially in rural communities—so mothers and newborns can get the right care at the right time, no matter where they live.”

Justin Duncan, president of the Sho-Me MIH Network stated, “by improving education, training and coordination of care, the program will address two core areas. First, it will prepare EMS clinicians to better respond to high-risk OB, delivery and post-delivery resuscitation. Additionally, from a proactive approach, it will identify high-risk OB patients, be proactive in their care via integration of MIH-CP resources, reduce unnecessary 911 calls, EMS transports to the hospital emergency department, and unnecessary hospital admissions, while improving outcomes for mothers and infants. This training initiative is essential for building a pipeline of trained clinicians who can serve as future mentors and educators across the state.” Shelby Cox, executive director of the Missouri EMS Association, added, “this EMS high-risk OB training is the underpinning for a quality EMS workforce. It will increase knowledge and strengthen skills of EMS clinicians to meet the needs of maternal health patients whether they are in crisis or being served in a non-emergent environment.”

MRHA is serving as the fiscal agent for the grant, ensuring effective coordination and long-term sustainability, and is partnering with the Sho-Me MIH Network on project promotion and implementation. An advisory committee will assist with readiness assessment, curriculum development and training/instruction, with representatives invited from the Missouri EMS Association, Missouri EMS for Children program, Children’s Mercy Hospital, St. Louis Children’s Hospital, Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, University of Missouri, EMS subject matter experts, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, and others.

MRHA’s mission is to provide leadership on rural priorities through advocacy, partnerships, and education. For more information about MRHA visit [mrhassociation.org](http://mrhassociation.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Fontenot, J, Lucas, R, Stoneburner, A, Brigance, C, Hubbard, K, Jones, E, Mishkin, K. Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care Deserts and the Crisis of Access and Equity in Missouri. March of Dimes. 2023. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/assets/s3/reports/mcd/Maternity-Care-Report-Missouri.pdf>