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NATIONAL RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (NREDA)

## Rural Economic Development: 2026 Federal Priorities

### WHY THIS MATTERS

Rural America faces workforce shortages, rising housing costs, aging infrastructure, and declining healthcare access.

**Without action:** workforce decline, business contraction, hospital closures, and economic instability.

**With investment:** rural communities can strengthen economic growth, energy production, and supply chains.

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

- 46 million Americans (1 in 5) live in rural areas
- Rural economies support agriculture, energy, manufacturing, and logistics
- Federal investment strengthens national competitiveness

## KEY PRIORITIES & SOLUTIONS

### 1. Federal Resource Access

**Challenge:** \$40B+ across 400+ programs is difficult to access

**Solutions:** streamline applications, reduce duplication, expand technical assistance

### 2. Workforce

**Challenge:** Labor shortages and skills gaps

- 32% of small businesses cannot fill jobs

**Solutions:** invest in CTE/apprenticeships, support childcare/transportation, incentivize hiring

### 3. Housing

**Challenge:** rents ↑ 31% vs. incomes ↑ 5.5%; 40%+ cost-burdened

**Solutions:** expand tax credits/financing, support modular housing, increase homebuyer assistance

### 4. Infrastructure

**Needs:** broadband, energy, water, transportation

**Solutions:** expand funding, prioritize last-mile broadband, support partnerships, Universal Service Fund contribution reform

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## 5. Healthcare

**Challenge:** 140+ hospital closures; 44% negative margins

**Solutions:** stabilize hospitals, expand workforce incentives, invest in telehealth, adjust reimbursement

## 6. Capital & Development Tools

**Challenge:** limited financing and technical assistance

**Solutions:** expand CDFIs/SBDCs, increase REDLG funding, simplify programs

### BOTTOM LINE:

*Federal investment in rural America strengthens the entire U.S. economy.*

## LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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### Workforce & Small Business

- Farm Workforce Modernization Act
- CONSTRUCTS Act

### Housing

- Rural Housing Service Reform Act
- Housing for the 21st Century Act

### Infrastructure

- Revitalizing Rural Communities Act
- Rural Broadband Assistance Act
- ReConnecting Rural America Act

### Healthcare

- Rural Residency Planning Act
- Hospital Inpatient Services Modernization Act

### Capital Access

- EDA Short Form Application Act
- CDFI Bond Guarantee Improvement Act

## CALL TO ACTION

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Congress should advance a comprehensive rural prosperity agenda that:

- Expands access to federal resources
- Invests in workforce, housing, and infrastructure
- Stabilizes healthcare systems
- Strengthens capital access

*National Rural Economic Development Association (NREDA) | [www.NREDA.org](http://www.NREDA.org)  
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