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Outreach

RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER ISSUE #10: November 2025

Neighbors, leaders, and new opportunities coming together for healthier tomorrows: West Alabama CareStation Patient Registration Events

Across the rural roads and rolling landscape of West Alabama, something meaningful is happening. It's not just about technology or healthcare access; it's about people coming together, neighbors helping neighbors, and communities embracing new opportunities for wellness.

As a way of lifting up the availability of the CareStations across four counties, a small Auburn University contingency, including students Janaya Wheeler and Clara Ragan, co-hosted patient registration events alongside dynamic and compassionate Cooperative Extension staff.

In Gainesville (Sumter County), the atmosphere was pure hospitality. Patients walked in with smiles and hugs, making the event feel more like a family gathering than a registration event. Administrator Simone Williams shared her heart: "My role and passion are to serve and gain a deeper understanding of the community. I've always been in an administrator role, but I feel I'm meant to be a leader." Her words captured the spirit of Gainesville, where leadership means listening and caring.

Over in Boligee (Greene County), gratitude filled the vast community center space. Residents spoke with pride about the OnMed Care Station, praising its privacy, cleanliness, and extended hours of operation. Local leaders, Mayor Hattie Samuels and Commissioner Roshanda Sumerville, encouraged everyone to spread the word. Their excitement wasn't just about a new service. It was about what it represents: healthcare that feels close, personal, and possible.

In Akron (Hale County), Extension leaders Jovita Lewis and LaTarsha Tubbs welcomed residents with warmth and information. Their efforts weren't just about signing people up; they were about building trust and making sure every neighbor knows this resource is here for them. Sadly, due to a global software outage, many of their attendees had to be rescheduled for a future event. This highlighted the understanding that although telehealth is convenient and accessible, nothing can completely replace the human touch.

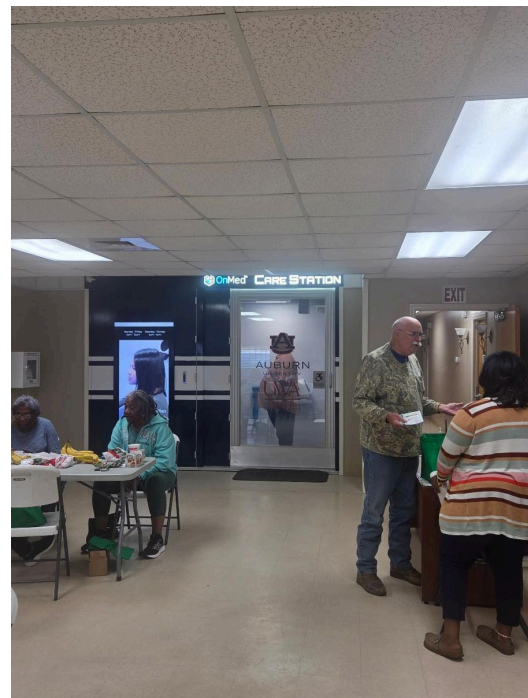
And in Catherine (Wilcox County), conversations buzzed with curiosity and appreciation. Residents loved the convenience and quick wait times. One person summed it up perfectly: "It's amazing! You can easily stop by after work, in passing, and get checked out. People

need to know about it!” That sense of ease—healthcare that fits into daily life- is what makes the station so valuable.

The Auburn University team traveled alongside these efforts, lending support to local leaders and helping ensure registration events ran smoothly. Their role was simple but important: to listen, assist, and learn from the communities they serve.

Across all four counties, the message was clear: access matters, and community matters even more. These CareStations are more than machines; they’re bridges, connecting rural residents to the care they deserve, in places they call home.

As these stories unfold, one thing shines through: the strength and resilience of Alabama’s rural communities. With every registration, every conversation, and every smile, we were reminded that healthcare is about people first.





Bringing Mental Health Education to Tallapoosa County residents.

As a part of the Rural Mental Health Education Initiative (RMHEI), RHI has partnered with Tallapoosa Extension, Iota Delta Sigma (the Auburn Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, a counseling honors society, and Auburn's Counselor Education program to bring mental health education to rural Tallapoosa County residents.

Currently, 1st-year clinical mental health counseling graduate students are leading a series on various mental health topics that Tallapoosa residents have identified as most needed in their community. Topics include Getting to Know Mental Health, Everyday Stress and Feelings, A Beginner's Look at Alcohol & Substances, and Coping with Hard Times & Feeling Connected.

Graduate student Anna Beth Gandy has concluded the first two sessions of the series, which were very successful with an outstanding turnout. Students have thoroughly enjoyed being involved and working with upper-class IDS members, who have guided them in creating and supporting their presentations. Students hope to continue this Initiative in more rural areas across Alabama in the near future.



YPiT's Rural Health Trip to Chambers County

Young Professionals in Training (YPiT) visited the Chambers County Community Health and Wellness Center in LaFayette to explore rural health. Participants toured the OnMed® Care Station, an interactive telehealth unit that offers real-time consultations and diagnostics at no cost to residents. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System made the trip possible to share information and reduce health disparities in rural areas.

Community leaders, in partnership with the Auburn University Rural Health Initiative, continue working to expand affordable health services, develop wellness programs, and strengthen health infrastructure in Chambers County. The tour reflects YPiT's commitment to community service and civic responsibility.

Professor and nurse clinician Dr. Linda Gibson-Young helped participants connect classroom lessons to real-world community impact. As a leader at the Chambers County Community Health and Wellness Center, she supports improving access to care and providing preventive services for rural communities. YPiT members joined a community fitness class and created "mini-commercial" videos to highlight the center's resources, gaining insight into how they can advocate for healthier communities in Auburn and across Alabama.

AU RHI Health & Wellness Locations

Chambers County

Chambers Community Health and Wellness Center

404 9th Ave SW, LaFayette, AL 36862

Mon–Fri: 8 AM–8 PM | Sat: 1 PM–6 PM

(334) 459-0173

Ms. Leah Sledge Ins0007@auburn.edu (334) 864-9373

Ms. Debra Ward warddeb@auburn.edu (334) 459-0173

Greene County

Boligee Community Center, 17404 County Road 20, Boligee, AL 35443

Mon–Fri: 9 AM–6 PM

Ms. Iris Sermon — (334) 844-5442 | ics0017@uburb.edu

Hale County

Akron Public Library, 207 1st Ave South, Akron, AL 35441

Tue: 8 AM–5 PM | Wed & Thu: 8 AM–12 PM | Fri: 5 PM–8 PM
Ms. LaTarsha Tubbs — (334) 844-4017 | lct0012@auburn.edu

Sumter County

Gainesville Municipal Complex, 10900 State St, Gainesville, AL 35464

Mon–Fri: 8 AM–6 PM

Ms. Shakeria Williams — (334) 844-5029 | ssw0046@auburn.edu

Wilcox County

Elijah Tracey Shaw III Community Center, 17349 AL-5, Catherine, AL 36728

Regular Hours:

Mon/Wed/Fri: 9 AM–1 PM | Tue/Thu: 1 PM–6 PM

Shanicqa Davis — (334) 844-3011 | smd0122@auburn.edu

For more information, visit auburn.edu/outreach/ruralhealth.

Mark Your Calendar!

Community Conversations on Mental Health

- Hosted by Auburn University Rural Health Initiative in partnership with Auburn’s College of Education CMHC program.

Location: Central Alabama Community College – Betty Carol Graham Technology Center, 675 Cherokee Road, Alexander City, AL 35010

- Nov 21, 2025 – “A Beginner’s Look at Alcohol & Substances”
- Dec 5, 2025 – “Coping With Hard Times and Feeling Connected”

For More Events Please Visit



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