

Local leaders unite to advance rural healthcare in the Adirondacks

SARANAC LAKE – On March 20, the Adirondack Health Foundation hosted its inaugural Rural Health Symposium at North Country Community College, bringing together more than 80 local and regional attendees to discuss and help shape the future of healthcare across the Adirondack Park.

Centered on the theme “Navigating Change: The State of Rural Healthcare in an Uncertain Era,” the symposium created a forum for dialogue, collaboration, and forward-thinking solutions aimed at strengthening healthcare delivery in rural communities.

The program featured a keynote overview by President and Chief Executive Officer of the Iroquois Healthcare Association, Kevin Kerwin, followed by a panel discussion with regional leaders representing healthcare administration, clinical care, public health, and workforce development. Panelists included Adirondack Health President and Chief Executive Officer Aaron Kramer; Adirondack Health Hospitalist Program Medical Director Amy Corliss, MD; North Country Community College President Joe Keegan; and Public Health Director of Franklin County Public Health Services’ Hannah Busman, MPH.

The panel explored the realities of delivering care in rural communities, including workforce challenges, access to services, behavioral health needs, and the importance of cross-sector collaboration to support patients both inside and outside the hospital setting. President and Chief Executive Officer of Adirondack Health, Aaron Kramer, emphasized that “resiliency in rural healthcare depends on collaboration across hospitals, education, public health, and communities.”

The discussion highlighted both the challenges and opportunities facing rural health systems, including innovative partnerships, workforce pipeline development, and the increasing importance of addressing social determinants of health to improve patient outcomes. Jen Balog, executive director of the Adirondack Health Foundation, described the symposium as “a call to action,” emphasizing the importance of continuing these discussions and building on the momentum to strengthen healthcare across the region.

Adirondack Health is currently pursuing its third consecutive Pathway to Excellence redesignation through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The Pathway framework boosts recruitment, improves retention, and enhances quality care through six key standards, including shared decision-making, leadership, safety, quality, well-being, and professional development. During the panel discussion, Kramer noted that 44 percent of Adirondack Health employees have been with the

organization for ten or more years, and eleven percent have been with the organization for 25 or more years. There are currently no long-term contracted or “traveling” staff. However, expenses continue to outpace revenue and inpatient volumes have decreased.

The event reinforced the Foundation’s mission to support Adirondack Health through philanthropy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships, ensuring that high-quality care remains accessible close to home. Building on the success of this inaugural event, the Adirondack Health Foundation plans to continue convening partners, fostering collaboration, and establishing the Rural Health Symposium as an annual initiative to sustain ongoing dialogue and progress in rural healthcare.



President and Chief Executive Officer of the Iroquois Healthcare Association Kevin Kerwin gives the keynote address at the March 20 Rural Health Symposium at NCCC in Saranac Lake as panelists Aaron Kramer, Dr. Amy Corliss, Joe Keegan, and Hannah Busman look on.