INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ'Я УКРАЇНИ

Національна служба здоров'я України

АКАДЕМІЯ НСЗУ



“INVESTING IN RURAL HEALTH. INVESTING IN UKRAINE’S FUTURE.

Call to Action for strengthening Rural Health in Ukraine

Emerging from the International Conference “Rural Health in Wartime” and the multi-stakeholder workshop, Kyiv, 10-11 September 2026

A SHARED COMMITMENT FOR HEALTHIER RURAL COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE

On 10 September 2026, more than 270 participants from Ukraine, Europe and beyond came together in Kyiv and online for the international conference “Rural Health in Wartime: Practical approaches to service delivery, community health, and workforce support.”

The conference was organized by the International Rescue Committee, under the endorsement of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the National Health Service of Ukraine and the National Health Service of Ukraine Academia. The conference brought together representatives of government institutions, healthcare providers, local authorities, academia, civil society, international organizations, donors and communities to explore how to ensure access to quality healthcare for people living in rural, remote and frontline communities.

On 11 September, 30 experts representing 22 different actors continued this discussion through a dedicated multi-stakeholder workshop. Participants reflected on the experiences and solutions presented during the conference and worked together to identify critical challenges, priorities and practical actions for the future of rural health in Ukraine.

This Call to Action reflects the priorities and recommendations emerging from these two days of discussion. It is intended to contribute to ongoing policy dialogue and collaboration on rural health in Ukraine. It does not replace national policies or strategies but seeks to build on existing progress and identify areas where collective action can help accelerate and sustain change.

WHY RURAL HEALTHCARE AND WHY NOW?

Before the full-scale war, a third of Ukraine’s population lived in rural areas. Many have since left, but for those who remain (one in five being older than 65 years) accessing healthcare can involve significant geographical, financial and practical barriers.

Decisions being made in Ukraine today will shape rural health for a generation. Health system recovery and reconstruction is estimated to require more than USD 23.6 billion over the next decade, and the frameworks, financing priorities and instruments that will govern that investment are being designed while the war continues.

This creates an opportunity to ensure that rural communities are considered explicitly within health system recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term health planning.

Since 2024, Ukraine has introduced a number of measures relevant to rural and frontline healthcare, including rural and combat-zone financing coefficients, state-supported housing for rural physicians, supported access to medications and a legal framework for telemedicine. These developments provide an important foundation. At the same time, existing assessments, and discussions during the conference and workshop highlighted the need to better connect these measures, strengthen implementation, address remaining gaps and ensure that successful approaches can be sustained and scaled.

The consequences of inaction extend well beyond the health sector. Poor health outcomes reduce labor productivity, weaken workforce participation, increase healthcare costs, and hinder local development. Conversely, healthy populations form the foundation of resilient and thriving communities, enabling greater economic participation, stronger social capital, and sustainable development.

Agriculture is the third largest contributor to Ukraine’s economy. In 2021 agriculture represented 10.9% of Ukraine’s GDP and employed 2.5 million people. Accessible primary healthcare and effective prevention should therefore be recognized as strategic investments in human capital, community resilience, and local economic growth.

CALL TO ACTION

Based on the discussions held during the multi-stakeholder workshop following the Rural Health in Wartime Conference, participants developed a shared Call to Action outlining four priority areas. These reflect a shared understanding that improving rural health requires better evidence and analysis, practical solutions for service delivery in the communities, a coherent policy approach, and mechanisms to keep the work moving. These recommendations call on all stakeholders involved in planning, financing, delivering, and supporting healthcare services, including national and local authorities, health institutions, international agencies, donors, and international and local organizations, to advance the following.

1. Build the evidence needed to understand rural health and guide investment

Across policies, programs and actors, “rural health” is used to mean different things, including a territory, a type of service, or a population. That inconsistency makes it difficult to plan, finance, or measure anything coherently. A shared working definition of what rural health encompasses in Ukraine must be a starting point for everything that follows.

Further analysis is then needed to better understand the current situation and emerging trends in rural health, including the availability and distribution of health facilities and health workforce, unfilled vacancies versus workforce needs, access to primary healthcare services including the Affordable medicine program, and the use and effectiveness of existing support mechanisms.

Rural communities are not homogeneous. Different groups face different social, economic, physical, administrative, and geographical barriers to care, and the analysis should be disaggregated enough to show those differences. Building an evidence base at that level of detail is what will make tailored solutions possible.

Part of the analysis should examine the financial implications and value of different approaches to rural health. Where appropriate, cost-benefit and cost effectiveness analysis should be used to compare approaches such as mobile medical teams, telemedicine, community-based services and other models of bringing care closer to people, with a clear Return on Investment forecast.

This comprehensive analysis is needed to inform decision-makers where investment is most needed, which approaches deliver value, and how different models can be adapted and scaled across different rural and remote contexts.

2. Support and scale approaches that respond to the realities of rural and remote communities

Focus should be given to approaches supporting the following:

- **Service availability and reach:** enable more flexible delivery models including specialized medical assistance, strengthen coordination of existing mobile medical teams; expand telemedicine allowing for personal data sharing and cross-communication; and improve transport solutions.
- **Community health and capacity:** enhance communication about available services and prevention through channels communities use, focusing on new or underutilized mechanisms; strengthen health literacy so people can act on the information received; and support community leadership in health planning and service coordination.
- **Health workforce support:** address workforce shortages through innovative measures, benefit packages formed around professional, financial and social components, and opportunities to engage, even temporary, internally displaced or junior health professionals in underserved areas.

All efforts should build on existing policies and financing mechanisms wherever possible, adapting current instruments and improving implementation of provisions that remain underutilized: the Procedure for Providing Primary Health Care (MoH Order No. 504) for low-density and security-affected communities; the telemedicine procedures now in force; and the Law on the Public Health System.

3. Develop a coherent national approach to rural health applicable across all rural areas

Rural health requires a coordinated, long-term approach that connects existing policies, programs and initiatives, and provides a common direction for future investment. A national rural health strategy should:

- set clear priorities and principles across the three dimensions (service availability and reach, community health and capacity, and health workforce support);
- connect the measures outlined across different policies and those introduced since 2024, following the Presidential decree, into a single framework, rather than a set of parallel instruments;
- translate those priorities into specific policy, regulatory and financing mechanisms, with institutional responsibility named for each, including at central and local level;
- provide a clear pathway from policy to implementation, including a roadmap, financing considerations and arrangements for monitoring progress.

4. Establish a mechanism for continued rural health coordination and action

Create a regular multi-stakeholder mechanism (Rural Health Working Group) to turn this Call to Action into sustained progress, bringing together national and local authorities, healthcare providers and professionals, academia, civil society, international organizations, donors and other relevant experts. Its role should be to:

- review and further develop recommendations emerging from the Call to Action;
- support coordination between national policy and local implementation;
- identify opportunities for joint action, research and pilot initiatives;
- monitor progress and emerging challenges;
- maintain regular dialogue on rural health policy, investment, and implementation.

The mechanism must have a clear mandate, defined responsibilities, and a regular schedule of meetings, so that the commitments made through this process can continue to move forward.

Approaches should be evidence-informed, regularly evaluated and documented, so that successful models can be refined, replicated, and scaled rather than developed as isolated initiatives.



“ OUR COMMITMENTS

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) commits to supporting Ukraine's health system, learning alongside it, and contributing to the implementation of this Call to Action. We will place our expertise, operational experience, and resources behind efforts to strengthen rural health services by expanding the evidence base on rural health; providing technical expertise to policy dialogue, working groups, and coordination mechanisms; sharing operational experience from rural, remote, and frontline service delivery; documenting and evaluating promising approaches; supporting the testing and adaptation of innovative models where appropriate; and connecting Ukrainian institutions and partners with relevant international experience and evidence. We call on our valued partners and donors to join us in further supporting the implementation of this Call to Action and investing in stronger, more resilient rural health systems for Ukraine's future.