With decreasing rural populations and changing federal regulations, many rural hospitals have struggled to maintain financial viability in recent years. In 2017, 6,210 total hospitals operated in the United States; 2,250 of these are rural hospitals. Nationally, 113 rural hospitals have closed since January 2010. Furthermore, the rate of rural hospital closures from 2013 to 2017 was twice as high as the rate of the previous five years. In January 2010, SLC member states had approximately 831 rural hospitals. Since then, 81 rural hospitals (9.7 percent) in the South have closed.

This SLC Regional Resource examines the unique circumstances facing rural hospitals and communities today, including healthcare regulations and recent federal actions aimed at directing greater financial support toward rural healthcare providers, followed by a review of legislation adopted in the 15 SLC member states addressing rural health, rural hospitals and their challenges.