



Expanding Rural Access Through Innovation and Community Care

2025 CSAC Challenge Awards

OVERVIEW: A mobile program with vending machines is allowing Nevada County to expand urgent and preventative health care access for vulnerable populations in isolated, rural communities.

CHALLENGE: Nevada County is home to more than 100,000 residents, with nearly two-thirds living in unincorporated, isolated areas. Many in these communities are struggling to access basic health services forcing people to face long wait times, limited provider capacity and significant transportation barriers. Roughly 30 percent of the county's population — nearly half of elementary students — relies on Medi-Cal and finding a primary care doctor or dentist is challenging. This lack of access has real consequences for families and vulnerable populations who often go without essential services such as immunizations, dental care and chronic disease screening. Untreated tooth decay in children impacts academic performance, nutrition and overall well-being. Only two Medi-Cal dental clinics exist to serve thousands of children, compelling some families to drive far away to Sacramento or Yuba City for care, while others simply go without.

SOLUTION: To address these inequities, Nevada County Public Health designed a creative model, blending in-person care with accessible self-service resources directly and consistently to the people who need it most.

- **Mobile Health Van:** Launched with Covid-19 pandemic recovery funding, the mobile health unit travels monthly to six rural locations providing immunizations, dental screenings, HIV and Hepatitis C testing, and soon, blood pressure and diabetes screenings.
- **School-Based Oral Health Program:** Oral health teams screen children in grades TK–8, ensuring positive early dental experiences that build trust and healthy habits. Three Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice joined the program providing cleanings, molar sealants, fluoride treatments and dentist referrals.
- **Health-Focused Vending Machines:** Five machines located at health centers, community hubs and government offices provide discrete 24/7 access to free or low-cost essential items such as toothbrushes, Narcan, first aid kits and pregnancy tests. Partnerships with Yuba Harm Reduction Collective and Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital keep supplies well-stocked.

INNOVATION: Mobile health units are not new, but Nevada County's approach takes things a step further by combining clinical outreach with self-service health resources. By pairing in-person services with vending machines, the county ensures

that care is available at the point of need and around the clock. This integrated system reflects a deep understanding of rural barriers—geography, transportation, cost and stigma, ensuring residents can access care on their own terms, with dignity.

RESULTS: The program’s impact has been measurable and immediate. Since 2022, the Oral Health Program has screened 1,522 students, expanding to 10 schools in 2024–25 with 725 screenings, a 59 percent increase from the year before! The mobile van now provides 10 percent more immunizations and screenings at five rural sites, plus additional outreach to high-risk populations such as unhoused residents and families served by Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Community Beyond Violence. The vending machines are gaining popularity and distribute hundreds of items each week.

REPLICABILITY: The Health on the Move model is highly replicable for other rural counties through grants, partnerships and existing Public Health staffing. Vending machines require an upfront investment but can be economically maintained by collaborating with hospitals and nonprofit groups to supply low-cost health products. For counties facing similar geographic and financial barriers, this approach demonstrates Nevada County’s motto “meeting people where they are”—whether at a school, a community hub, or government center—can transform access to care.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS: (1) [Nevada County's Public Health New Mobile Unit](#) (2) [Launch Video](#) (3) [Mobile Health Clinic Nevada County - Fox 40 News](#) (4) [Nevada County Health Supply Vending Machine Program CDPH ACE](#) (5) [New Vending Machine Enhances Access to Health Supplies in Truckee - Tahoe](#) (6) [KVMR Radio Interview](#)