

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Project Reach*

How many Alaskans will be served by the project?

10,000-24,999

Populations Served*

What populations will be served by your project? Select all that apply.

Alaska Native peoples
 Alaskans with behavioral health and substance use disorders
 Alaskans with complex care needs
 Alaskans with or at risk of chronic disease
 Children and youth
 Elders and older Alaskans
 Pregnant and postpartum women
 Rural Alaskans

Serving Rural Alaskans*

Please describe how your project will improve access, quality, or sustainability of health care for rural, remote or frontier communities.

South Peninsula Hospital (SPH) is owned by the Kenai Peninsula Borough and operated by South Peninsula Hospital, Inc., a locally governed 501(c)(3), and one of only three independent Critical Access Hospitals remaining in Alaska. SPH serves a population of 15,000 spread across 16 communities and hundreds of square miles.

This project will upgrade and expand SPH's food service infrastructure, enhancing SPH's ability to provide healthy food in our community and support important social connections that are formed and maintained when we eat healthy food together.

In addition to providing inpatient and nursing home resident meals, SPH serves complementary full lunches and dinners or healthy snacks at all education and outreach programs, which engaged 6,539 participants last year. SPH's education team has found that providing nourishment has a huge impact on participants—it meets their physical needs before engaging them in health education, and it fosters social connections. In addition, about 500 individuals from the community purchase meals at the hospital cafeteria each month—a number that has tripled since 2024. With affordable meals and the only salad bar in town, the SPH cafeteria has become a de facto social gathering place in Homer, especially for seniors. Our aim is to amplify the role of the cafeteria as well as SPH's programs in supporting healthy nourishment and positive social connections.

By expanding the capacity of the SPH food service infrastructure, this project will:

1. Improve access to healthy food: SPH will be able to provide more free meals at education and outreach programs as well as more affordable meals to our community at the SPH cafeteria. (The cafeteria often cannot meet the lunch demand for meals for visitors and staff, and each year, participation in SPH education and outreach programs grows, putting additional strain on kitchen infrastructure.)
2. Improve access to healthy social connections: Expanded kitchen capacity will support education and outreach programs that seek to reduce social isolation in the region through shared meals and health

programming, and this added capacity will support the role of the SPH cafeteria in serving as a social gathering space.

This project directly addresses Alaska's RHTP Goal #1: Promote Lifelong Health and Wellbeing for Rural Alaskans, and supporting seniors to age well close to home.

Project Overview

Project Concept Opportunity*

Briefly describe the problem or opportunity you want to address with this project.

As we know in Alaska perhaps more than anywhere in the country, a meal is not just nutrients. It is culture, tradition, social connection, and health. But one in seven adult Alaskans—and one in six Alaska kids—are food insecure according to Feeding America. Healthy food can be hard to come by, especially in Alaska's rural communities where grocery prices are often exorbitant and not everyone can harvest wild foods, and in many cases, the availability of wild foods is changing. The SPH 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment identifies food insecurity as a factor affecting health in the region. Our elders often face extra challenges accessing healthy food, including the challenges of affordability when on a fixed income, traveling to shop for groceries in harsh winter conditions, and just the difficulties of cooking and dining for those who live alone.

At the same time, our communities are witnessing an epidemic of loneliness and its outcomes. According to a 2023 Health and Human Services report, about half of American adults experience loneliness. Loneliness is linked to chronic illness—increasing rates of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. Being socially isolated is as risky for your health as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, while social connection can help reduce the risk of chronic disease and serious illness.

SPH is poised to help address these challenges by supporting healthy, shared meals in our community.

Project Concept Approach*

Please describe your proposed approach to the above problem or opportunity.

According to the National Council on Aging, seniors who share meals with others experience improved physical and mental health and a better quality of life. SPH supports meal-sharing among seniors and others through its programs and cafeteria lunchtimes.

For example, SPH provides a free weekly from-scratch soup and bread dinner during its public Wellness Wednesday health education and outreach programs. We know from feedback that for some people in the region, especially the elderly, this is their once-weekly opportunity to eat in community. In addition, SPH provides free healthy meals at its annual Senior Wellness Day, and at its annual Community Resources Connect event, which provides support and services to people experiencing homelessness or economic instability (this event served 115 people this year). Additionally, SPH provides healthy snacks at regular events, such as a weekly indoor walking program that regularly hosts 60 or more individuals each week, spring-time community walking celebrations, and Breast Cancer Awareness month events. The SPH kitchen is the invisible workhorse behind these programs.

Meals are, of course, also provided at the hospital cafeteria, which is open to the public 11 am - 1 pm daily. Over the last two years or so, the SPH cafeteria has become a popular gathering space for seniors looking for a place to share affordable, healthy meals with friends. Lunches served to the public have tripled since 2024.

As demand for SPH meals for hospital patients and residents has increased with higher patient and resident censuses, and participation rates in our education and outreach programs have grown, the capacity of our food service infrastructure is maxed out.

Alaska's RHTP presents a generational opportunity for rural hospitals like ours to leverage the synergistic connection between high quality food and social connection to improve health in our region. SPH will purchase and install the following equipment:

1. Walk-in Cooler: SPH has run out of cooler space, and needs more capacity to support patient care as well as public meals and programs.
2. Double Oven: To double the capacity of SPH's oven space to meet growing needs. Current oven space is maxed out, running nonstop morning through evening to prepare food in time for patient meals and public programs.
3. 10-Burner Range: This will nearly double SPH's stove top capacity to meet current needs.
4. Steam Table: This piece of equipment helps keep hot meals hot.

Project Concept Preliminary Outcomes*

What change would you expect to see if this project is successful and on what timescale?

This project directly addresses key findings of SPH's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, a collaboration with MAPP, our regional health coalition, which found that social isolation is a top community concern and that community programs promote social connection and better health. SPH works closely with Homer Senior Citizens to align services for our senior population, and this project is part of our collaborative effort to promote community meals in the region.

Immediately upon project completion:

1. Oven capacity will be doubled.
2. Stove top capacity will be increased by 67%.
3. 100% of food held at proper temperatures during meal service.
4. 50 - 75% increase in cooler space.

Within 12 months of project completion:

1. Free meals and snacks provided to 7,000 participants in SPH education and wellness programs
2. More than 100 free meals provided to participants of annual Community Resource Connect, for individuals experiencing housing or financial insecurity
3. Free meals provided to 30 participants in annual Senior Wellness Day
4. 1,120 free meals provided to participants in weekly Wellness Wednesday events
5. More than 50% of Wellness Wednesday survey respondents feel that shared meal is an important part of the event, and value the social connection that the event provides

Project Concept Sustainability*

How will the change initiated by this project persist after the project ends?

The SPH cafeteria has become a stable go to for healthy meals for community members. The volume of visitors and staff has increased significantly over the past few years. By installing much needed replacement

equipment, the cafeteria will continue to thrive and be open for the community. Without equipment, capacity will be limited and revenue would be reduced. The hospital cafeteria has seen a rapid increase of 13% of revenue from FY24-FY25 bringing in \$730,835 in revenue in FY25. Replacing the equipment will keep the cafeteria open and sustain itself through cafeteria sales for community and staff members and allow for continued growth, which will help sustain additional replacement needs in the future. In addition to self-sustaining revenue, the healthy meals the cafeteria provides also help with prevention of chronic diseases. Preventing even one hospital admission for diabetes or heart disease will save over \$100,000 in patient care expenses to patients and insurance. This project will also build ties between SPH and the community at large. By providing free community meals at education programs, SPH builds connections to residents in the region, enhancing community engagement with the hospital. And by welcoming public patrons at the cafeteria, SPH provides a warm welcome to public into its facility, before any medical need occurs.

Project Concept Key Risks or Uncertainties*

What potential risks do you anticipate, and what is your plan to mitigate them?

As with any project in rural Alaska, supply chain delays, weather disruptions, and delivery issues are key uncertainties that could affect the timing of equipment delivery. SPH is prepared to launch an RFP immediately for the equipment to enable project completion within 12 months, even if there's a long lead time for delivery.

Other uncertainties include lower than anticipated program participation rates and/or cafeteria attendance, as well as staffing gaps, or participants being unwilling to complete voluntary surveys. We will work hard to market health and wellness programs, continue to make the cafeteria as welcoming as possible and keep prices affordable, and work to ensure redundancies in staffing wherever possible. To boost survey response, we will include educational materials about how the survey information will be used and will hand them out person-to-person to make the process welcoming and understandable.

This project is aligned with completion of one part of the SPH Master Facilities Plan, which includes an expansion of the cafeteria seating area by 50%.

Project Partnerships*

Do you have key partners identified for this project?

No, partners are not needed for this project.

Readiness & Scope Snapshot

Stage of Development*

Please assess the current stage of your proposed project. Your answer does not commit your LOI to a specific funding pathway but rather informs understanding of the project's development stage.

RHTP funding is available for all pathways.

Concept Formation: The project is taking shape, but key elements are still being developed. Scope, partners, budget and workplan details have not yet been established. Funding at this stage would support refining the

project concept, early coordination, and building administrative readiness to prepare for a full project application.

Defined Approach: The project has a defined approach that aligns with RHTP goals. The scope and deliverables are partially defined, there is a general sense of the budget, partners have been identified, and roles are generally understood. Some administrative, staffing, and evaluation infrastructure capacity is in place. Early thought has been given to long-term sustainability and scalability. Funding at this stage supports critical planning efforts to strengthen and refine a detailed project workplan to prepare for implementation.

Ready to Launch: The project has a complete plan aligned with RHTP goals, with clear scope, objectives, budget, milestones, and deliverables. Partners are committed, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and staffing, resources, and infrastructure are in place. The approach is supported by data collection, evaluation, and monitoring systems. Project sustainability is built into the design. Funding at this stage supports immediate execution of projects that advance rural health transformation goals.

Ready to Launch

RHTP Initiative Areas*

RHTP funding supports projects aligned with Alaska's six RHTP initiatives. Funded projects may work across more than one initiative. Based on your current project approach, select all that apply.

Healthy Communities

RHTP Allowable Uses*

RHTP projects must align with and advance Alaska's goals and six RHTP initiatives and strengthen access, quality, coordination, and sustainability of health care, particularly in rural and remote communities. Federal law allows RHTP funds to be used for the activities listed below in support of these initiatives. Based on your current project concept, select all that may apply. (Note: for more information on the RHTP allowable uses, see the Alaska Department of Health RHTP webpage).

Capital expenditures and infrastructure
Prevention and chronic disease

Estimated Project Duration*

Based on your project concept, how long do you anticipate needing to complete the proposed work?

12 months

Project Duration*

Please explain if your project has multiple phases, dependencies, or other nuances to the project duration.

We anticipate this project will take 12 months or less to complete.

Estimated Funding Range for First Year of Funding*

While RHTP is a five-year initiative, funding will be awarded annually. For the project scope you outlined, what resources do you anticipate needing for this funding round's project period?

\$50,000-\$250,000

Future Funding Needs*

Please describe future funding needs for this project (beyond this project period). If you are unsure of future funding needs, please indicate that below. If you do not have funding needs beyond this project period, please write "N/A."

N/A

Potential Support Needs*

In addition to grant awards, RHTP will include opportunities for grantee learning and support. To gauge potential offerings, what potential support might you be interested in?

None at this time

Acknowledgements & Certifications

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I understand that submission of this Registration & LOI does not guarantee funding and may result in an invitation to submit a Full Proposal, a request for refinement, or deferral to a future cycle.

I certify that:

- No funds received under this award will be used for lobbying activities.
- I will not attempt to influence government officials on decisions related to this award or other legislative or administrative matters using awarded funds.
- Awarded funds will not be used for religious proselytizing or activities intended to promote or discourage adherence to a particular religious faith.

Yes

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