National Rural Health Association

Who we are
The National Rural Health Association is a national nonprofit and nonpartisan membership organization with more than 21,000 members. NRHA membership consists of a diverse group of individuals and organizations, all of whom share the goal of improving rural health. NRHA strives to improve the health of the 60 million who call rural America home.

NRHA’s Mission
To provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research.

What we fight for
Access to care
Rural populations are per capita older, sicker, and poorer than their urban counterparts. Continued cuts have devastated the financial viability of rural practice, disrupted rural economies, and eroded availability of care. Medical deserts are appearing across rural America leaving many without timely access to care.

A robust rural workforce
Rural areas recruit and retain an adequate health care workforce. 77% of rural counties are Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas while 9% have no physicians at all. With far fewer physicians per capita, the maldistribution of health care providers between rural and urban areas results in unequal access to care and negatively impacts rural health.

A strong rural health safety net
The federal investment in rural health programs is a small portion of federal health care spending, but it is critical to rural Americans. These safety net programs increase access to health care, improve health outcomes, and increase the quality and efficiency of health care delivery in rural America.
**Who are rural Americans?**

**Older**
Approximately 10 million people ages 65 and older live in rural America and a quarter of older Americans live in a small town or other rural communities.

**Sicker**
According to the CDC, rural Americans are more likely to die of the five leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory disease.

**Poorer**
19% of rural Americans, including 25% of rural children, are still living in poverty. Rural economies are still struggling to recover from the Great Recession.

**Why are rural Americans at risk?**

**Rural Hospital Closures**
95 rural hospitals have closed since 2010, and nearly 700 are vulnerable. Rural hospitals create not just access to care, but jobs and economic opportunities as well. Rural hospitals are often one of the largest employers in a community.

**Distance and Isolation**
In an emergency, rural patients must travel twice as far as urban residents to the closest hospital. As a result, 60% of trauma deaths occur in rural America, even though only 20% of Americans live in rural areas.

**Lack of Necessary Providers**
There is a severe shortage of providers and of specialty care across the continuum of rural health services. This lack of access means a crisis like the opioid epidemic hits rural America harder - the rate of overdose deaths in rural counties is 45% higher than in metro counties.

**Multiple Payments Cuts**
Rural hospitals have absorbed $180.3 million in cuts under bad debt alone. Multiple cuts have caused a loss of more than 10,000 community jobs in one year and a $769 million loss to GDP. Across the board cuts don’t effect hospitals equally.
THE GROWING DIVIDE BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AMERICA

Health disparities continue to grow as care vanishes from rural communities.

Limited resources, geographic isolation, low population density, and persistent poverty create unique barriers to care in rural communities.

In rural areas there are significantly higher rates of chronic diseases, and while these diseases may be curable, in rural America they are often left untreated, leading to higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy.

INCOME AND HEALTH

In rural communities, poverty rates continue to climb, and opportunities for mobility are disappearing. As incomes decline, so does health.

DYING OF CURABLE CANCERS

As rates of cancer deaths drop nationally, CDC research shows that rural Americans are still dying from cancers that should be curable. CDC has found higher mortality rates in rural areas than urban areas, and this gap is growing.
DISPARITIES WITHIN RURAL COMMUNITIES
Rural minority communities often experience the worst health outcomes.

INCREASING RURAL DIVERSITY
Diversity is increasing in rural communities according to the CDC, unfortunately so are health disparities within rural communities among and between different ethnicities.

THE HEALTH STATUS OF RURAL ADULTS

RURAL COUNTIES WITHOUT OBSTETRICS
Disparities begin before rural children are even born. More than 200 rural obstetrics units closed from 2004-2014. The most vulnerable communities were the most likely to lose obstetrics services and the most unlikely to find other care.

MATERNITY CARE IS DISAPPEARING
Rural counties with higher percentages of African-American women were more than 4 times as likely to have lost services than those with higher percentages of white women, and more than 10 times as likely to have never had services to begin with.
In rural America, hospitals are one of the largest employers in the community... but we need policies to help them keep their doors open.

The average rural hospital: Employs 321 full-time individuals and invests $7.1 million into local communities through wages, salaries and benefits. These providers also create access to care that encourages employers to open businesses in a community. Without rural providers, rural America will not have a healthy future.

Hospitals, schools, churches... It’s the three-legged stool. If one of these falls down, you don’t have a town.

- John Henderson, CEO and President, Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals (TORCH)

Across the country, health care generates jobs and growth. The same is true in rural areas struggling to create opportunities.

Rural America did not recover from the Great Recession, and in many communities, jobs continue to disappear. Even though 20% of Americans live in rural counties, these areas make up just 3% of job growth since the Recession.

According to the USDA, nearly 25% of rural children are growing up in poverty, compared to only 20% of urban children.