



For immediate release
March 9, 2021

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NRHA announces 2021 Rural Health Award recipients

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is proud to announce the association's 2021 Rural Health Award recipients. NRHA's Rural Health Awards are given each year to individuals and organizations in the field of rural health who have dedicated their time and talents to improving the health and well-being of others.

"We're extremely proud of this year's winners, particularly because of the extra challenges rural health care providers have faced since the COVID-19 pandemic began," says NRHA CEO Alan Morgan. "They have each made tremendous strides to advance rural health care, and we're confident they will continue to help improve the lives of rural Americans."

Coalfield Health Care is this year's Outstanding Rural Health Organization. Located in the heart of Logan County, one of the most rural counties in West Virginia, Coalfield helps bolster the health of a community that has some of the worst outcomes in the country. Coalfield has served not just as a primary care center for patients regardless of ability to pay, but as an educational, research, and community outreach hub for more than 10 years.

Northeast Kentucky Substance Use Response Coalition has been named NRHA's Outstanding Rural Health Program. This formal network of health care and social service organizations represents 18 counties and is focused on building a community-based approach to address the region's opioid crisis. The organization's mission to create educational, clinical, and preventive interventions for those who struggle with substance use disorder has become even more vital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alison Hughes has been awarded the Louis Gorin Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Health Care. Now retired, Hughes previously served as director of the Arizona Office of Rural Health. During her career, she helped build Arizona's rural health care infrastructure, promote the rural health workforce, and encourage early adoption of telemedicine. "She led the charge for the health and wellness of rural Arizonans and rallied many people who followed her along the way," says Susan Kunz of Susan Kunz Consulting. "Alison achieved what great leaders achieve – she inspired many others who continue the work."

Jennifer Bacani McKenney, M.D., is NRHA's Rural Health Practitioner of the Year. McKenney is a family physician in her hometown of Fredonia, Kan., a community of approximately 2,500 people in the southeast part of the state. She has owned and managed a practice alongside her father for the last 10 years. "Dr. McKenney truly embodies the attributes of a strong, dedicated health care provider deserving of our trust," says Joyce Grayson of the

University of Kansas Medical Center. “Dr. McKenny says it best by describing herself as a ‘people-connecting family doc doing cool stuff for the future of Fredonia.’”

Alana Knudson, Ph.D., is NRHA’s Outstanding Researcher Award winner. As director of the NORC Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis, Knudson has become a nationally recognized leader in developing and evaluating CMS and FORHP demonstration projects. Her teams produce impactful research to improve sustainable rural access to high-quality services. “Alana is beloved by all who know her and is widely regarded within the research community as one of the foremost champions for rural communities and rural people,” says Michael Meit of ETSU Center for Rural Health Research.

Douglas Snow is this year’s NRHA/John Snow Inc. Student Leadership Award winner. As a medical student at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, Snow plays an integral role in student leadership for NRHA as chair of the association’s Student Constituency Group. “At national, state, and local levels, he has made a lasting impression on rural health leadership and student involvement as well as community and public health,” says Shelby Owens of Michigan State University College of Human Medicine.

Kelly Dougherty has earned the NRHA/John Snow Inc. Student Achievement Award. A medical student at the University of Missouri, she has re-established the university’s rural medical interest group and highlighted the need for rural providers. She is also an active member of the Rural Scholars Advisory Board. “We’ve both always said the best way to get more practitioners in rural areas is to find students who call rural America home and give them a community of people to help them get them back there to provide care,” says MU student Rebecka Ernst.

Pat Schou is NRHA’s Volunteer of the Year. In addition to her role as executive director of the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network, Schou is a longtime NRHA member and advocate, as well as past president of the association. She helped guide and represent NRHA during one of the most trying times in our nation’s history – during the COVID-19 pandemic – always making sure rural America’s voice was heard on a national stage. She is a role model for how to lead in the worst of times in the most honorable way.

NRHA President John Gale has selected the **National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health** to receive this year’s President’s Award.

NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and providing leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research. NRHA membership consists of more than 21,000 individuals and organizations. To learn more about NRHA, visit ruralhealthweb.org