

2019-2020
IMPACT REPORT

*Enhancing THE
Health Status
OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS*

Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

For nearly thirty years, the **PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH (PORH)** has collaborated with local, state, federal, and private partners to achieve equity in, and access to, quality health care for Pennsylvania's rural residents. One of fifty state offices of rural health in the nation, **PORH** serves as a source of technical assistance, partnership development, networking, and advocacy to advance rural health access.

PORH was established through a federal-state partnership and is funded by federal, state, and other sources of support. Located at the Penn State University Park campus, PORH is part of the Department of Health Policy and Administration in the Penn State College of Health and Human Development.

PORH'S areas of expertise focus on rural health, agricultural health and safety, oral health, population health, quality improvement, partnership development, rural health advocacy, and community.

VISION

To be recognized as the premier rural health leadership and information organization in Pennsylvania and to be one of the most effective state offices of rural health in the nation.

MISSION

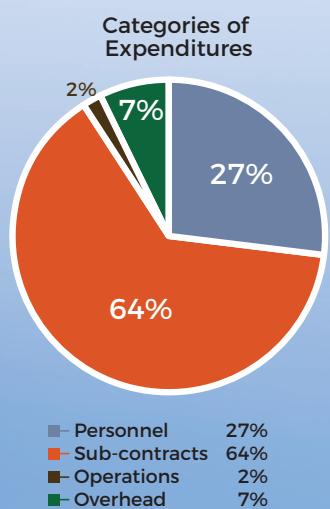
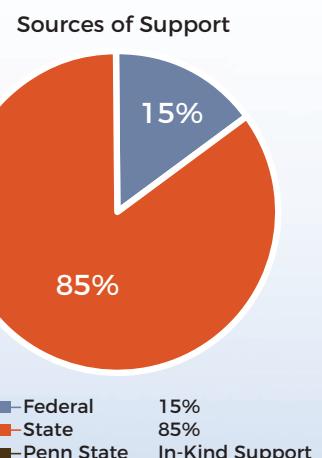
To enhance the health status of rural Pennsylvanians and ensure that rural residents have access to high quality, affordable health care.

SERVICES

PORH staff provides technical assistance, information dissemination, partnership development, continuing education, policy development, small rural hospital and rural health care provider support, research, and agricultural outreach.

FUNDING

PORH is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, other state and federal agencies, and with in-kind support from Penn State.



STATE AT A GLANCE

12.8 million

State Population
(2018 U.S. Census Bureau)

23%

% of Population
Considered to
be Rural

15

Critical
Access
Hospitals

60

Rural
Hospitals

70

Rural
Health
Clinics

91

Rural
FQHC/CHC
Look-alike
Sites

IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS

Technical Assistance and Advocacy for Healthy Rural Communities

Providing technical assistance to rural health care providers and communities and disseminating information are two of the core functions of a State Office of Rural Health. In 2019-20, **PORH** staff provided more than **800** technical assistance services to communities, state and local agencies, health care providers, educators, and consumers, which received information on funding opportunities, project development, grant reviews, best practices, referrals, tools, and more.

PORH advocated for strong rural health care delivery systems through participation on committees and task forces across Pennsylvania and at the national level, served state and federal agencies in designing new health care models of care, and much more!

Strengthening Population Health through Community Health Initiatives

PORH assisted Pennsylvania's small rural hospitals in addressing identified community health needs. **PORH's** population health web-based data collection and presentation tool includes 100 measures to support community

Recognition of Leadership and Excellence

- 2019 National Rural Health Day Celebration
- 2019 Pennsylvania Rural Health Week Proclamation
- 2019 Recognition of Rural Health Leaders in Pennsylvania
- 2019 Recognition of Rural Health "Community Stars" Across the State

Continuing Education and Training

- Rural Health Care Transformation Summit
- Rural Human Trafficking Summit
- Grant Writing Skill-building Webinar Series
- Federal Grants Webinar
- Penn State Ag Progress Days
- Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicator Training

health needs assessments and track progress on priority areas. These data were used in planning, decision support, evaluation, quality improvement, and partnership building. Publicly available data can be accessed at porh.psu.edu.

PORH's quality improvement coordinator assisted in coordinating the National Rural Health Resource Center's Post-Acute Care Virtual Summit. This event explored issues, challenges, and strategies for integrating rural acute and post-acute care in population health and value-based payment initiatives.

Increasing Access to Oral Health and Primary Care Integration in Rural Communities

PORH continued to assess the impact of the Medical Oral Expanded (MORE) Care Collaborative in Pennsylvania. This initiative integrates oral health in primary care services provided by Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and coordinates dental referrals with oral health providers in each community. The fourteen participating RHCs promoted oral health during pediatric well visits.

Supporting Rural Health Clinics to Increase Service and Expand Operations

PORH continued to promote the integration of oral health services into primary care in the state's RHCs through the Pennsylvania Department of Health's "New Approaches to Oral Health Infrastructure and Capacity" project. **PORH** continued collaboration with the Practice Operations National Database (POND®) to assist RHCs in

optimizing clinical financial performance, compensation, and productivity. RHCs participated in health care transformation programming and in training on billing and coding to increase revenue.

Promoting Quality Improvement in Rural Health Care Delivery Systems

A primary emphasis at **PORH** is to assure high-quality health care in rural Pennsylvania and in the state's Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs). In 2019-20, **PORH's** extensive training efforts continued with the CAH quality improvement directors. Initiatives focused on the continued development and enhancement of antibiotic stewardship programs, a partnership with the Pennsylvania Health Promotion Council on population health initiatives, quarterly quality improvement meetings to promote targeted and shared learning, and the expansion of **PORH's** quality improvement web portal for resources and information. Hospital Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program (MBQIP), Emergency Department Transfer Communication (EDTC), and Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) data were analyzed to determine areas for improvement for action plan development and implementation. **PORH** staff also provided extensive input into trauma-informed care at the Penn State College of Medicine.

Supporting Rural Health Care Transformation in Pennsylvania

In 2019-20, **PORH** continued to provide significant assistance in the implementation of the Pennsylvania Rural Health Model. The Model focuses on rural health care transformation, in conjunction with hospital global budgets, to increase



IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS...

rural Pennsylvanians' access to high-quality care, improve health, and reduce the growth of hospital expenditures across commercial and public payers. The Model is the first of its kind in the nation to target rural hospital global budgeting, transformation, and population health.

PORH Staff and Programs Receive National Awards

Lannette Fetzer, quality improvement coordinator at **PORH**, received the 2019 Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP) Spirit Award in recognition of her rural health care leadership and advocacy and for applying her extensive clinical experience to advance quality improvement in CAHs).

Pennsylvania was ranked in 2019 as the number one MBQIP program in the nation on behalf of the state's CAHs. Pennsylvania was one of the very first states to achieve 100 percent reporting by CAHs to MBQIP and is one of the few programs in the nation to have a staff member dedicated to quality improvement.

Raising Awareness about Rural Human Trafficking

PORH expanded our initiative to bring awareness to, and educate about, human trafficking and its prevalence and impact in rural communities. Human trafficking—the use of force, fraud or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act—can happen in any community and victims can be any age, race, gender or nationality. Rural areas can be particularly vulnerable due to isolation, geography, and transportation routes that facilitate human trafficking. Education, awareness, and an understanding of local, state, and federal resources are essential to identifying potential human trafficked individuals and assisting them in getting the help they need. In partnership with federal and state partners, **PORH** coordinated the first Pennsylvania Rural Human Trafficking Summit.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the national Public Health Emergency (PHE) gave **PORH** staff excellent opportunities to modify and expand

our services. Responding to the pandemic reinforced the importance of partnerships, knowledge, creativity, and flexibility in rapidly pivoting activities to meet the needs of rural providers and communities.

Significant technical assistance was provided to CAHs, other small rural hospitals, and RHCs on national and state regulatory and policy changes, federal and state COVID-19-related funding, and much, much more. Critical information was summarized for CAHs and RHCs and distributed daily to increase efficiencies for health care facility leadership and staff. All in-person events and meetings were moved to virtual formats to include CAH/RHC quarterly meetings, annual summits and conferences, as well as, coding and billing bootcamps for rural hospitals and RHCs. Resources were distributed to limit Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing shortages, and substantial input was provided to the state on meeting the needs of vulnerable populations during the PHE.

Targeted outreach and education, based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-approved materials, were distributed to Amish and Mennonite communities through direct mailings and articles published in newspapers read by these populations.

ASSISTING PENNSYLVANIA'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS IN USING PESTICIDES SAFELY

Through the Pennsylvania Rural Health Farm Worker Protection Safety Program, **PORH** staff provided technical and compliance assistance to agricultural producers on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Worker Protection Standard (WPS) to prevent illness or injury from pesticide exposures.

PORH staff continued to update WPS training materials to meet federal requirements, provide on-site individual compliance assistance visits at agricultural production sites, speak at grower and agricultural safety and health meetings, and distribute

information and materials at events. A continued emphasis focused on the Respirator Fit Test process. The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for growers in obtaining required PPE. As meetings and events were canceled, growers faced barriers in finding options for continuing education credits needed to maintain pesticide certification. **PORH** assisted growers in locating PPE and identifying alternatives for training.

This program is a collaboration between **PORH** and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.



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