

2018-2019  
IMPACT REPORT

*Enhancing* THE  
*Health Status*  
OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS



PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF  
RURAL HEALTH



PennState

# Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

For more than twenty-five 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 in the state, regionally, and nationally. **PORH** is funded through a federal-state partnership and through foundation 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, partnership development, quality improvement, rural health advocacy, and community and economic development.

## 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

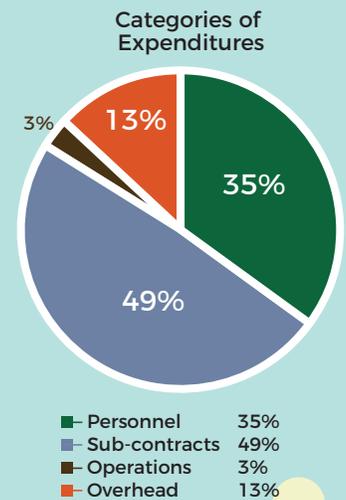
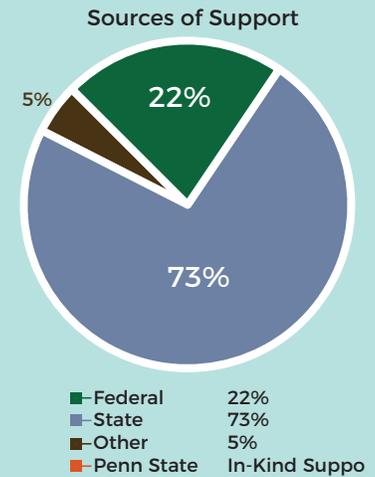
To enhance the health status of rural Pennsylvanians and ensure that rural residents have access to high quality, affordable health care.

## 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 other agencies and foundation; 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

**68**  
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 2018-19, **PORH** staff provided more than 800 technical assistance services to communities, state and local agencies, health care providers, educators, and consumers, with information on funding opportunities, project development, grant reviews, best practices, referrals, tools, and more.

**PORH** advocated for strong rural **PORH** 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** refined the population health web-based data collection and presentation tool for use in planning, decision support, evaluation, quality improvement, and partnership building. The small rural hospitals participating in the project, and the communities and regional collaborations they serve, have access to local data for more than 100 measures. These data support community health needs assessments and track progress on priority areas. Publically-available data for participating counties can be accessed at [porh.psu.edu](http://porh.psu.edu).

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

In partnership with the DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement, **PORH** continues

implementation of the Medical Oral Expanded (MORE) Care Collaborative in Pennsylvania. MORE Care integrates oral health in primary care services provided by Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and coordinates dental referrals with oral health providers in each community. Fourteen RHCs are actively participating in MORE Care. **PORH** is engaging additional RHCs interested in addressing oral health within their practice. **PORH** also initiated a contract with Practice Operations National Database (POND®) to assist RHCs in optimizing clinical financial performance, compensation, and productivity.

## 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 fifteen Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs). In 2018-19, **PORH's** extensive training efforts with the CAH quality improvement directors continued. Initiatives focused on the development of an emergency department provider report card; collaboration with the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania on infection, sepsis, and antibiotic stewardship prevention; a partnership with the Pennsylvania Health Promotion Council on population health initiatives; on-site and group meetings to promote targeted and shared learning; and the expansion of a web-based portal for resources and information. Individual 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.

## Recognition of Leadership and Excellence

- 2018 National Rural Health Day Celebration
- Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicator Training
- 2018 Pennsylvania Rural Health Week Proclamation
- 2018 Recognition of Rural Health Leaders in Pennsylvania
- 2018 Recognition of Rural Health "Community Stars" Across the State

## Continuing Education and Training

- Community and Public Health Conference
- Grant Writing Skill-building Webinar Series
- Federal Grants Webinar
- Pennsylvania Rural Legislative Briefing
- Penn State Ag Progress Days
- Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicator Training

## Supporting Rural Health Care Transformation in Pennsylvania

In 2018-19, **PORH** provided significant assistance to the Pennsylvania Department of Health on the implementation of the PA Rural Health Model. The Model focuses on rural health care transformation, in conjunction with hospital global budgets, to increase 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.

## Pennsylvania Small Rural Hospital Program Received National Quality Excellence Award

For the third year in a row, the Pennsylvania Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Program received the 2018 Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP) Certificate of Excellence Award in recognition of

## IMPACT AND HIGHLIGHTS...

outstanding Critical Access Hospital (CAH) state quality reporting and performance. For FY18, **PORH's** Flex program was recognized as one of the top three programs in the nation. The award was given by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). MBQIP is a quality improvement activity under the federal Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program and is focused on improving the quality of care provided in CAHs by increasing quality data reporting and then driving quality improvement activities based on the data. Pennsylvania was one of the first states in the nation to have 100 percent participation in MBQIP.

## Raising Awareness about Rural Human Trafficking

In 2018-19, **PORH** launched an 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. **PORH** coordinated a webinar training, gave presentations, and developed, in collaboration with federal and state partners, the first Pennsylvania Rural Human Trafficking Summit.

## 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's (EPA) Worker Protection Standard (WPS) to prevent illness or injury from pesticide exposures.

The Pennsylvania Rural Health Farm Worker Protection Safety Program staff continued to update WPS training materials to meet the requirements in the 2015 WPS regulation revision. Four new training DVDs for the mushroom, nursery, vegetable, and grape industries, were released for growers in Pennsylvania and in other states. During the year, a continued emphasis was placed

on training growers on the Respirator Fit Test process. Although this testing has been a federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirement for over thirty years, it is a new requirement for most Pennsylvania growers.

Program staff continued to provide on-site individual compliance assistance visits to agricultural production sites across the state, speak at grower and agricultural safety and health meetings, and exhibit information booths.

The Pennsylvania Rural Health Farm Worker Protection Safety Program is a collaboration between **PORH** and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.



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