

2022-2023 IMPACT REPORT

Enhancing THE *Health Status* OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS



PennState

Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

For thirty-one years, the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH)** has championed 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.

Located at the Penn State University Park campus, **PORH** is part of the Department of Health Policy and Administration in the College of Health and Human Development.

PORH's leadership guides our expertise in rural health, agricultural health and safety, oral health, population health, quality improvement, partnership development, 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.

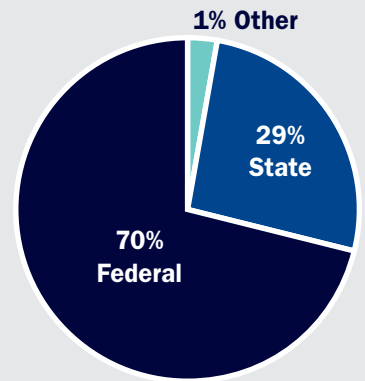
Services

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

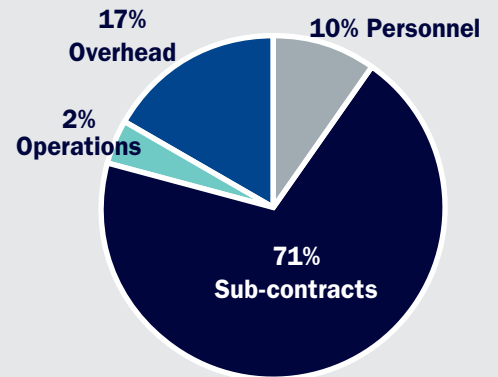
Funding

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.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT



EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS



2022-2023 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

2,930

Individual
Clients Served

631

Types of Technical
Assistance Provided

834

Types of
Clients Served

29%

Increase in Rural Residents
Fully Vaccinated for COVID-19

15

Continuing Education
Programs Hosted

750

Individuals Attending
Continuing Education Programs

166,103

Website
Visits

2

Magazines

4

Research
Briefs

STATE AT A GLANCE

13 million

State Population
(2020 U.S. Census Bureau)

26%

Population Considered
to be Rural

16

Critical Access
Hospitals

48

Rural Hospitals

69

Rural Health
Clinics

91

Rural FQHC/CHC
Look-alike Sites

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 2022-23, **PORH** staff provided 631 types of technical assistance to 2,930 individual clients, representing 834 types of assistance to communities, state and local agencies, health care providers, educators, and consumers. Information on funding opportunities, project development, grant reviews, best practices, referrals, tools, and more were shared.

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!

Rural Health Programs and Activities

Strengthening Population Health through Community Health Initiatives

PORH assisted Pennsylvania's small rural hospitals in addressing identified community health needs.

- Updated population health tools and resources for small rural hospitals to prepare Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) and find data for grant applications.
- Provided data and information for all forty-eight rural counties in the state with links to any rural county.
- Access porh.psu.edu/population-health/ for more details!
- In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association, **PORH** led the development of the 2024-2028 Pennsylvania Rural Health Plan, the first stand-alone rural health plan in the state since 2000. Look to early 2024 for the statewide and community-based launch!

Addressing Rural Health Care Workforce

Health care workforce has been, and remains, one of the primary challenges for rural leaders. **PORH** is committed to be part of the solution to this pervasive issue through outreach, education, and advocacy.

- **PORH** contracted with the North Dakota University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Boise State University, and 3RNET to conduct the first-ever Pennsylvania Community Health Center Community Apgar study to identify factors which help determine success in recruiting and retaining a high-quality physician workforce. Conducted at twelve rural Federally Qualified Health Centers, the results illuminated practice and community advantages and challenges that impact attracting physicians to rural practice.
- In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center and partners across the state, **PORH** participated in the Pennsylvania Primary Care Physician Pathway Planning Committee. Meeting at least monthly, this group of physicians, educators, and advocates is creating well-defined and flexible conduits for recruiting and retaining physicians and other health care professionals to rural communities. **PORH** also trained Community Health Workers on the importance of oral health on overall health status.

Supporting Rural Health Clinics

PORH continues to offer technical assistance and support to Pennsylvania's sixty-nine Rural Health Clinics (RHC) to increase organizational capacity and financial viability.

- Assisted with RHC certification survey readiness.
- Coordinated continuing education events for RHC leadership and staff.
- Disseminated timely updates and education.
- Provided technical assistance on quality improvement strategies.
- See porh.psu.edu/rural-health-clinics/ for more information.

Promoting Oral Health and Primary Care Integration

Since 2016, oral health has been a priority at **PORH**. In 2022-23, **PORH**:

- Collaborated with statewide partners to explore solutions to the oral health workforce shortage.
- Promoted medical-dental integration in rural areas.
- Educated Community Health Workers on the importance of oral health to overall health.
- Access porh.psu.edu/oral-health/ for more information!



Supporting 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 (CAH). In 2022-23, **PORH**'s extensive training efforts with the CAH quality improvement directors continued.

- Continued development and expansion of antibiotic stewardship programs, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Health Promotion Council on population health initiatives.
- Provided extensive technical assistance Pennsylvania CAHs on quality improvement metrics.
- Hosted quarterly quality improvement meetings to promote targeted and shared learning.
- Expanded the quality improvement web portal for resources and information.
- Analyzed Hospital Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program (MBQIP), Emergency Department Transfer Communication (EDTC), and Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) data to determine areas for improvement for action plan development and implementation.
- Developed recommendations for future MBQIP quality improvement metrics and national population health and health equity initiatives.
- Advised the Penn State College of Medicine on trauma-informed care.

- Participated in strategic planning initiatives for the Penn State College of Medicine University Park campus.
- Delivered lectures on rural health to students considering future nursing and health care careers in rural areas.
- More information is available at porh.psu.edu/hospital-and-health-system-initiatives/quality-improvement-training-program/.

Targeting Rural COVID-19 Community-based Activities

Rural Pennsylvania faced serious consequences of COVID-19. **PORH** continued to implement the Health Initiative for Rural Pennsylvania (HIRP) to develop and implement COVID-19 reduction strategies in rural Pennsylvania through cross-sector county teams. Twenty counties were targeted for intervention: Bedford, Bradford, Cambria, Clarion, Clearfield, Fulton, Greene, Huntingdon, Indiana, Juniata, Lawrence, Mifflin, Potter, Snyder, Somerset, Susquehanna, Union, Venango, and Warren.

The program accomplished the following:

- Funded the twenty targeted counties with contracts totaling \$2.3 million to implement community-specific COVID-19 action plans.
- Developed the Rural Pennsylvania COVID-19 Learning Collaborative.
- Completed several phases of program evaluation.

- Launched a statewide marketing campaign focused on "Less Sick Time, More You Time."
- Achieved a 29 percent increase in rural residents fully vaccinated for COVID-19 in funded counties.
- Find out more at porh.psu.edu/health-initiative-for-rural-pennsylvania/.

Supporting Rural Health Care Transformation in Pennsylvania

In 2022-23, **PORH** participated in the Rural Health Redesign Center's activities to serve the eighteen rural hospitals participating in the PA Rural Health Model. This model is the first of its kind in the nation to target rural hospital global budgeting, transformation, and population health. **PORH** also advanced new models of care in the state.

- Served on the Board of Directors of the Rural Health Redesign Center Organization.
- Gave presentations on health care transformation, including the state-designated Outpatient Emergency Hospital and the federal Rural Emergency Hospital.
- Coordinated partnerships to establish the Rural Emergency Hospital model in Pennsylvania.
- Participated in statewide summits convened to advance the PA Rural Health Model and other health care transformation models.



Raising Awareness about Rural Human Trafficking

PORH continued the focus on raising awareness to target—and stop—human trafficking 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.

- Coordinated the annual Pennsylvania Rural Human Trafficking Summit, “At the Intersection of Opioid/Substance Use and Human Trafficking,” in collaboration with six federal and state partners.
- Over seventy-two individuals participated in the virtual 2022 Summit to gather facts and tools to take back to their rural communities to target and address the widespread human trafficking issue.
- Connections and referrals were provided to all participants.
- More information is available at porh.psu.edu/human-trafficking-and-the-rural-health-system-response/.

Assisting Pennsylvania’s Agricultural Producers in Using Pesticides Safely

Through the Pennsylvania Rural Health Farm Worker Protection Safety Program, **PORH** 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.

- Conducted twenty-six full compliance and technical assistance visits and visited 120 farms to distribute materials.
- Provided extensive assistance on pesticide respirator fit tests.
- Gave forty-six presentations and exhibited at thirty-one agricultural events.
- Assisted eighteen growers with implementing the usage of the mandated chemical Safety Data Sheets.
- Developed new training materials and reference manuals for growers, with a focus on Amish and Mennonite communities.
- Integrated **PORH**’s AgriSafe Nurse Scholar in farm safety education and outreach.
- For more details, see porh.psu.edu/worker-protection-standard-and-agricultural-safety-and-health/.

Training Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicators

PORH is perhaps the only state office of rural health in the nation that coordinates on-site and virtual certification trainings for public swimming pool and hot tub pesticide applicators, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. In 2022-23, **PORH**:

- Coordinated seven classroom trainings in preparation for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s pesticide application exam or maintain certification.
- All courses included state-mandated pesticide regulations, health safety information, and swimming pool information updates.
- Trained eighty individuals and provided assistance and guidance to more than 130 applicators.
- Learn more at porh.psu.edu/swimming-pool-pesticide-applicator-training-program/!

Must-Read Publications

PORH publishes two issues of the *Pennsylvania Rural Health* magazine each year to highlight salient rural health issues; successful programs and initiatives; medical students’ perspectives; outstanding leaders; resources for rural providers, advocates, educators; and more.

The Fall 2022 issue of the magazine focused on:

- Mental and behavioral health in rural communities.
- **PORH** continuing education highlights.
- Mobile clinics caring for rural central Pennsylvania.

The Spring 2023 issue of the magazine highlighted:

- Maternal health in rural communities.
- 2022 Pennsylvania community and state rural health community champions.
- Special programs to support Pennsylvanians.
- The 2022 Pennsylvania Community Star.
- Read our magazine at porh.psu.edu/media/magazine/.

PORH launched a new publication series in 2023, *Pennsylvania Rural Health Insights*, to explore issues impacting rural health care and rural health status in Pennsylvania.

- Issue #1: Veterans Health in Rural Communities.
- Issue #2: Oral Health in Rural Pennsylvania.
- Issue #3: Health Insurance Network Provider Adequacy: Implications for Consumers for Access to Care.
- Issue #4: Opioid Settlement Funding and What it Means for Rural Pennsylvania Communities.
- Read *Rural Health Insights* at porh.psu.edu/media/insights/.

Recognition of Rural Leadership and Excellence

- 2022 National Rural Health Day Celebration
- 2022 Pennsylvania Rural Health Week Proclamation
- 2022 Recognition of Rural Health Leaders in Pennsylvania
- 2022 Recognition of the Rural Health “Community Star” for the State

Continuing Education and Training

- Rural Health Care Transformation Summit
- Community and Public Health Conference
- Rural Human Trafficking Summit
- Grant Writing Skill-building Webinar Series
- Federal Grants Webinar
- Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicator Training





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This publication is available in alternative media on request. Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its workforce. U.Ed. HDD 24-751 MPC S166341