

2023-24 IMPACT REPORT

Enhancing THE
Health Status
OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS



PennState

For thirty-two 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

MISSION

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

In January 2024, **PORH** released its **2024-27 Strategic Plan** that guides **PORH** efforts to meet the evolving needs of rural health care. Organized into six goals, the plan addresses:

- › Launching a rural health policy agenda for Pennsylvania
- › Strengthening the rural health care delivery system
- › Promoting community and population health
- › Advocating for rural health care delivery systems and rural residents
- › Providing continuing education for agricultural producers, rural health care providers, and advocates
- › Expanding infrastructure and operations to support activities
- › Access the **2024-27 Strategic Plan** at porh.psu.edu/strategic-plan/

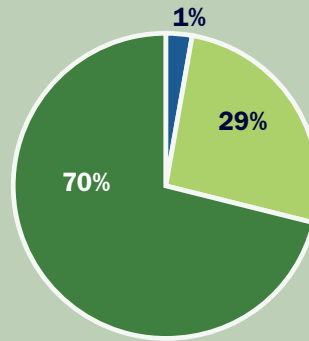




FUNDING

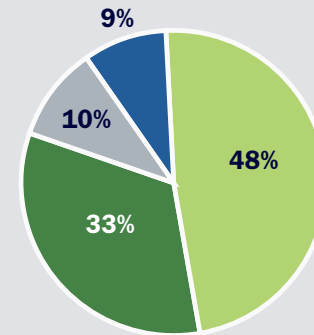
PORH is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, other state and federal agencies, and with in-kind support from Penn State.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT



- » 70% Federal
 - » 29% State
 - » 1% Other
- Penn State In-Kind

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS



- » 48% Personnel
- » 33% Sub-contracts
- » 10% Operations
- » 9% Overhead



2023-24 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

1,110
Individual
Clients Served

824
Types of Technical
Assistance Provided

24
Continuing Education
Programs Hosted

150,570
Website
Visits

2
Magazine Issues
Published



STATE AT A GLANCE

13 million
State Population
(2020 U.S. Census Bureau)

26%
Population Considered
to be Rural

16
Critical Access
Hospitals

62
Rural Hospitals

73
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 2023–24, **PORH** staff provided 834 types of technical assistance to 2,930 individual clients, representing 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 access 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** leads the development of the **2025–30 Pennsylvania Rural Health Plan**, the first stand-alone rural health plan in the state since 2000. Look to early 2025 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 and 3RNET to conduct a review of Rural Health Clinic provider recruitment and retention strategies. The results will illuminate practice and 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.

Supporting Rural Health Clinics

PORH continues to offer technical assistance and support to Pennsylvania's seventy-three 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 clinic operations and 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 2023–24, **PORH's** oral health activities included:

- › 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 assuring high-quality health care in rural Pennsylvania and in the state's Critical Access Hospitals (CAH). In 2023–24, **PORH's** extensive training efforts with the CAH quality improvement directors continued.

- › Continued development and expansion of antibiotic stewardship programs, in partnership with the Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program (MBQIP).
- › Provided significant technical assistance to the Pennsylvania CAHs on quality improvement metrics.
- › Provided extensive education to the CAHs regarding the Implementation of ICD-11.
- › Hosted quarterly quality improvement meetings to promote targeted and shared learning.
- › Expanded the quality improvement web portal for resources and information.
- › Analyzed 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.
- › 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/.

Supporting Rural Health Care Transformation in Pennsylvania

In 2023–24, **PORH** was substantially engaged in the Rural Health Sustainability initiative convened by the Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's Policy Office. In response to rural hospital and workforce issues, the planning committee organized by the Policy Office convened statewide in-person and virtual forums to identify issues and develop solutions to assure rural health viability in the state. Outcomes will be reported to Governor Shapiro in late 2024 and action plans identified.

PORH also participated in the Rural Health Redesign Center's (RHRC) activities to inform the Governor's Rural Health Sustainability initiative, including attendance at meetings with the RHRC's advisors and board members, and with leadership from the eighteen rural hospitals participating in the PA Rural Health Model. These meetings clarified the essential services that rural hospitals provide and effective reimbursement strategies. **PORH** also:

- › Served on the Board of Directors of the Rural Health Redesign Center Organization.
- › Coordinated partnerships to establish the Rural Emergency Hospital model in Pennsylvania.



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 individuals participated in the 2023 Summit to gather facts and tools to implement in 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 Penn State Worker Protection Standard program, **PORH** provides 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.

- › Conducted thirty-two full compliance and technical assistance visits and visited 175 farms to distribute materials.
- › Provided extensive assistance on pesticide respirator fit tests.
- › Gave twenty-eight presentations and exhibited at twenty agricultural events.
- › Assisted fourteen growers with implementing 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, visit 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 training for public swimming pool and hot tub pesticide applicators, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

In 2023–24, **PORH**:

- › Coordinated sixteen classroom trainings in preparation for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's pesticide application exam to be certified or maintain certification.
- › Included in all courses state-mandated pesticide regulations, health safety information, and swimming pool information updates.
- › Trained individuals and provided assistance and guidance to more than 125 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 2023** issue of the magazine focused on:
 - › Cover Article: The Impact of Climate Change on Health



- › Guest Column: A Prescription to Heal the Planet
- › The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Rural Health
- › Stopping Medicare fraud and abuse
- › The Rural Impact Podcast
- › Student Achievement Award
- › **PORH** continuing education highlights
- › Highlights of the **Spring 2024** issue included:
 - › Cover Article: The Intersection of the Local Food Movement, Agricultural Health & Safety, and Health Equity
 - › 2023 National Rural Health Day celebrations
 - › 2023 Pennsylvania community and state rural health champions
 - › The 2022 Pennsylvania Community Star
 - › Special programs to support Pennsylvanians
 - › Perspectives on training to be a rural primary care physician
 - › Support programs for the autism community
 - › Mobile vision services for youth

- › Read our magazine at porh.psu.edu/media/magazine/.

Recognition of Rural Leadership and Excellence

- › 2023 National Rural Health Day Celebration
- › 2023 Pennsylvania Rural Health Week Proclamation
- › 2023 Recognition of Rural Health Leaders in Pennsylvania
- › 2023 Recognition of the Rural Health "Community Star" for the State
- › 2024 Pennsylvania Health Equity Champion Award from the Office of Health Equity, Pennsylvania Department of Health

Continuing Education and Training

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



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