

2020–2021
IMPACT REPORT

Enhancing THE
Health Status
OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS

Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health

For thirty 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 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 College of Health and Human Development.

PORH's expertise in rural health, agricultural health and safety, oral health, population health, quality improvement, partnership development, rural health advocacy, and community and economic development guides our exceptional leadership to serve rural Pennsylvania.

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.

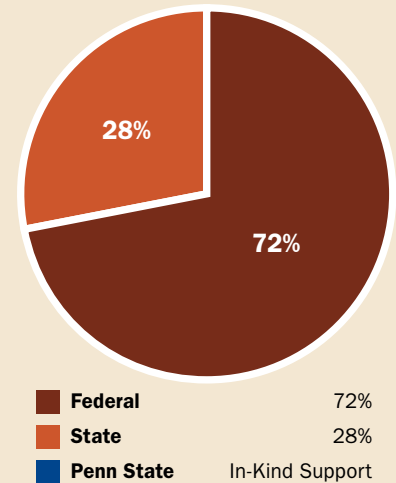
Services

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.

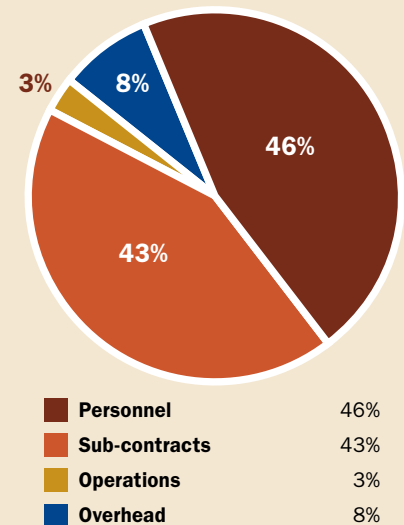
Funding

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



Categories of Expenditures



STATE AT A GLANCE

13 million

State Population

(2020 U.S. Census Bureau)

27%

% of
Population
Considered to
be Rural

16

Critical Access
Hospitals

(as of July 2021)

60

Rural Hospitals

69

Rural Health
Clinics

91

Rural FQHC/CHC
Look-alike Sites

IMPACTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

Responding to the COVID-19 Global 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 Critical Access Hospitals (CAH), other small rural hospitals, and Rural Health Clinics (RHC) 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 to increase efficiencies for health care facility leadership and staff. Virtual events include CAH/RHC quarterly meetings, annual summits and conferences, and a financial webinar series for rural hospitals and RHCs. Resources were distributed to ease 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. **PORH** offered extensive support to RHCs on federal reporting on the use of COVID-19 funds.

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 2020-21, **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 website features tools and resources to assist small rural hospitals with preparing their Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and researching data for grant applications. Population Health information is available for all forty-eight rural counties in the state, and can be easily accessed by selecting any rural county link on the map at porh.psu.edu/population-health.

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 RHCs and coordinates dental referrals with oral health providers in each community. The fourteen participating RHCs promoted oral health during well visits. **PORH** also provides technical assistance and collects data from three RHCs that received funding through Pennsylvania Department of Health's "New Approaches to Oral Health Infrastructure and Capacity" that adds in-house dental services, allowing patients to access medical and dental care in one location.

Supporting Rural Health Clinics

PORH continued collaboration with Practice Operations National Database (POND®) to assist RHCs in optimizing clinical financial performance, compensation, and productivity. On-

going technical assistance and support on required reporting, RHC billing, coding, administrative issues, credentialing providers, and facility certification helped RHC leadership achieve efficiencies.

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 CAHs. In 2020-21, **PORH's** extensive training efforts with the CAH quality improvement directors continued. 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 2020-21, **PORH** continued to provide significant assistance in the implementation of the Pennsylvania Rural Health Model. The Model focuses on rural health care transformation, in

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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.

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 getting them the help they need. In collaboration with federal and state partners, **PORH** coordinated the second Pennsylvania Rural Human Trafficking Summit.

Recognition of Rural Leadership and Excellence

- 2020 National Rural Health Day Celebration
- 2020 Pennsylvania Rural Health Week Proclamation

- 2020 Recognition of Rural Health Leaders in Pennsylvania
- 2020 Recognition of Rural Health “Community Stars” Across 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
- Critical Access Hospital and Rural Health Clinic Financial and Operational Webinar Series
- Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicator Training

Assisting Pennsylvania’s Agricultural Producers in Using Pesticides Safely

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


In the absence of onsite visits during the COVID-19 global pandemic, **PORH** continued to assist growers in understanding

and implementing WPS compliance. The pandemic left many growers without required personal protective equipment and pesticide educational credits. **PORH** filled those gaps and supported growers in meeting other requirements of the WPS, including respirator fit tests, posting Safety Data Sheets, and maintaining an Application Exclusion Zone. A contract with Keystone Health provided much-needed respirator fit testing and other support to the state’s agricultural producers.



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