



Rural Health Policy and Internship Forum

An Overview of Rural Health Policy

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This Presentation

- What is “rural”?
- Rural vs. urban – how are they different, and how does rurality impact health?
- The need for “rural health policy”
- My personal interest in creating the Rural Health Internships

What is “rural”?

- Rural is an inexact term that can mean **different things** to different people, organizations and governments.
- There are numerous federal and state-level **definitions of rural** that have been created over the years; there are three federal government agencies whose definitions of “what is rural” are in widest use:
 - the U.S. Census Bureau
 - the Office of Management and Budget
 - the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Why do we need rural definitions and how are they used?

- Rural definitions are very important for government functions related to **rural policymaking, regulation, and program administration**.
- Generally there is not one definition that fits all needs or programs. Each organization or **agency selects the best definition** that meets specific requirements for participation in their programs.
 - **Determining eligibility for Federal rural grant programs.**
 - **Implementation of programs and laws** that govern rural areas requires that policymakers, regulators, and administering agencies stipulate how rural will be defined.
 - **Research and data collection requires statistical consistency and accuracy, as well as validation**, by researchers and government agencies. Researchers must choose and consistently use a precise definition of rural.
- **What is meant by frontier?**
 - Frontier areas are the most rural areas of the nation, which are sparsely populated and are isolated from population centers and services by distance or physical barriers

Rural and Urban Areas – how do they differ – besides the definitions?

- Occupations - agriculture, extraction (coal, gas, lumber), manufacturing (paper mills); largest employers may be hospital and school system
- Culture
 - Religious institutions, 4-H, County Fair, Rotary
- Travel times (distance, terrain) and the importance of transportation
- Socioeconomic status
- Health insurance status
 - Small business and agricultural jobs less likely to provide insurance
- Broad band access
- Family, pride, tradition, independence

Urban vs. rural – even impact hotel amenities!



How does rurality impact health?

- Access to primary and specialty care
- Access to food, activities and an environment that promote a healthy lifestyle
- Health literacy
- Health insurance status
 - Small business and agricultural jobs less likely to provide insurance
- As a result – frequently, health outcomes are poorer for rural populations

Rural Health Policy

- **Rural health policy emerged as an area of research, programmatic and regulatory activity in the early 1980s to address these questions:**
 - How do we ensure access to affordable, quality healthcare for our rural residents?
 - How do we select Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement approaches that help rural healthcare facilities keep their doors open?
 - How can we attract healthcare providers to rural communities?
 - **Rural health policy is the set of principles and plans of action our government uses to address these and other rural health issues.**
- Rural health policy takes place at the **federal, state and local levels** of government. Many people and organizations are involved in the formulation of rural health policy, including:
 - Lawmakers
 - Government agencies
 - Membership organizations
 - Rural health researchers
 - Rural providers
 - Rural patients
 - Concerned citizens

Why I care about rural health....

- From 2001 – 2008 – I was the director of FORHP.
- Rural advocates – working on behalf of the people they knew and cared about....it was personal for them.
- And it's personal for me...

Shepherd University Rural Health Internships

- Want to contribute to Shepherd University – and support rural health advocacy
- How can I create a pipeline of talented, invested individuals who are knowledgeable about rural health? By creating a great learning experience
- Shepherd University Rural Health Internships
 - Two internships a year, for 10 years = 20 people who are prepared to advocate on behalf of the health of rural people.
- Where to get the knowledge and skills they need? FORHP, NRHA.
- Who?
 - Students from nursing, health business administration, social work – others?
- We're working on the selection process...

A Model for Other Shepherd University Supporters...

- ▶ Today – announcing my ten year commitment to support two Rural Health Interns at either the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy or the National Rural Health Association
- ▶ Are there others in our community who might make a similar commitment to support internships because..
 - ▶ They want to support Shepherd University
 - ▶ They have a passion for a policy arena, the arts, the sciences, business
 - ▶ They want to support our existing programs and course offerings

References

- RHI HUB (slides 3, 4, and 8)
- Rural Health in the United States, Tom Ricketts, III. 1999