



Healthier
Rural *America*

A Better Future for Rural Health Scaling the Action

Phil Polakoff MD, MEnvSc, MPH, Founder/CEO, *A Healthier WE*

“Rural Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being for one and all and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”



Adapted from the 1948 WHO definition



The Facts:

- Currently **60 million people** live in rural America.
- More than **172 rural hospitals have closed** since 2005 with hundreds more at risk.
- There is a **real shortage** of rural health care workers.
- **Broadband and Internet** connectivity are often limited and need upgrading.
- **COVID-19** is having a huge negative health impact but is also causing some positive innovation.
- The growing **rural-urban gap** in life expectancy

Federal Rural Programs > 400

Current Locations

13 Departments

10 Independent Agencies

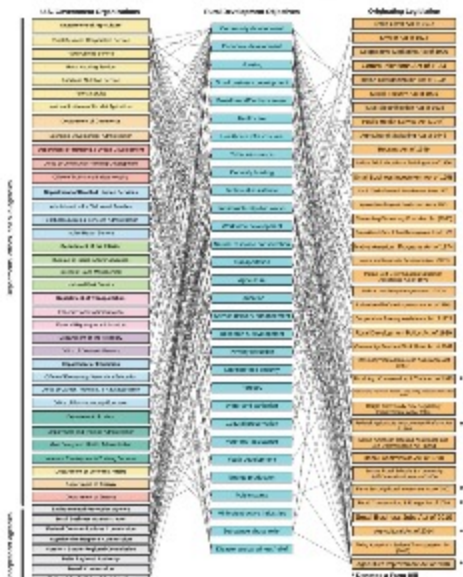
>50 Offices and Sub-Agencies

14 Legislative Committees

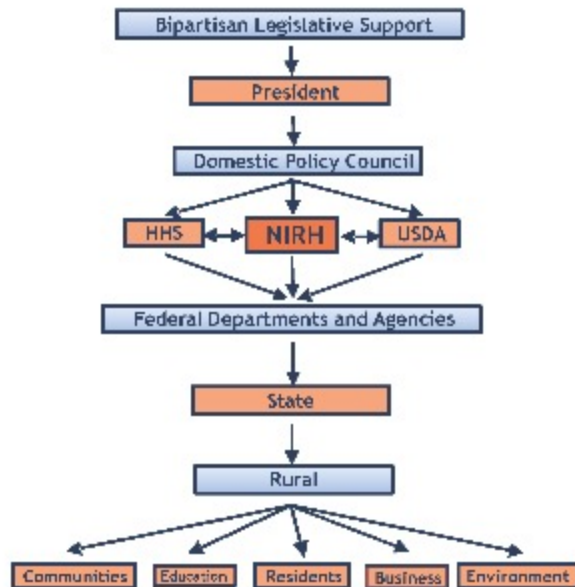
National Institute for Rural Health NIRH

Today's Model \longrightarrow Tomorrow's Model

Federal Development Assistance for Rural and Tribal Communities
While 2022 is the last year of the current federal fiscal year, the data in this chart is based on the most recent available data from the federal government. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all federal programs, but rather a snapshot of the current state of federal development assistance for rural and tribal communities.



Source: <https://www.hra.org/2022/01/12/federal-development-assistance-for-rural-and-tribal-communities/>



Moving Forward

Why Scale the Action Now?

Laying the Groundwork

What Do We Need to Do Differently Today?

**Focus on key foundational actions to create a
reimagined healthier Rural America**

San Miquel County, New Mexico 100 % Initiative

10 Vital Services

Surviving

Medical Care

Mental Health Care

Food Security

Housing Security

Transportation

Thriving

Parent Supports

Early Childhood Learning

Community Schools – Health Centers

Youth Mentors

Training Tied to Local Job Creation

Strategies- County Initiative Teams Work On

- Creating a one stop service hub with all ten service in one place
- Transforming all schools into service hubs with all ten services
- Leveraging rural community connectedness while ending the digital divide across rural counties, to ensure all residents have access to web-based information, services training and support.

Seven Foundational Actions to be Considered:

- 1.** Better health must include a stronger focus on poverty, quality, equity, environment, prevention, accountability and satisfaction.
- 2.** Health and access to health care is a civil right, not a privilege or only a business. Adequate insurance is only a part of the solution for better health.
- 3.** We must examine how digital ecosystems can enhance health and healthcare for all rural citizens and beyond.

Seven Foundational Actions to be Considered:

4. We need new ways to identify and use our whole rural health workforce.
5. Health provider leadership and training must include rural experiences and use of the full range of virtual tools available.
6. We must address with greater clarity how large agricultural corporations impact people, communities, states and our environment.

Seven Foundational Actions to be Considered:

7. The citizens of the nation, along with the healthcare systems, patients, providers, and payors must address all areas of how people live, where they live, where and what they do for work, how they remain healthy and obtain healthcare, where they go to school, what is happening in their homes and communities (the social determinants of health), if we are to finally realize a healthier rural America.

FUTURE INITIATIVES:

Identified, Supported and Targeted for a Healthier Rural America

Our present national, state and local times demand a new focus on leadership. For too long rural communities and the health of their residents have been undervalued and under supported. Systems must now address the many disparities, the lack of quality supports and the lack of equity.

The non-partisan INITIATIVES being put forth are an opportunity for all rural citizens and regional, state and national leaders to start these important conversations that lead to positive, sustainable change.

FUTURE INITIATIVES:

Identified, Supported and Targeted for a Healthier Rural America

PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES:

- Local health department support
- Sharper prevention focus
- Federal support and appreciation
- Include rural in research



DIGITAL INITIATIVES:

- Expand rural broadband
- Local assets sought
- Integration of health care
- Collaboration vs competition



FUTURE INITIATIVES:

Identified, Supported and Targeted for a Healthier Rural America

ECONOMIC INITIATIVES:

- Rural regional partnerships
- Rural cooperative models
- Increase capital availability
- Support systems for seniors



INSURANCE INITIATIVES:

- Rural citizens input for ACA revision
- Opioid prevention and affordability
- All health care insurance
- Employer based system changed



FUTURE INITIATIVES:

Identified, Supported and Targeted for a Healthier Rural America

RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVES:

- Tax incentives thru enterprise zones
- Free health care tuition for rural students
- Americorps model for additional resources
- Rural health profession rotation supports



ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES:

- Climate research and necessary actions to minimize its adverse impact on our environment
- Focus on research models to protect and preserve our natural resources
- Accurate assessment of current air, water and waste pollution and plans
- Generate innovative fire management and suppression programs (coordinated local, state, regional, national) to protect residents and communities



FUTURE INITIATIVES:

Identified, Supported and Targeted for a Healthier Rural America

ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVES:

- Rural job training
- Better digital support for all sectors
- Land Grant Colleges role
- New food distribution model(s)



POLICY CENTER INITIATIVES:

- Mandated national rural health institute
- Role of Land Grant Colleges
- ID local assets and needs





Moving Forward

Help our community leaders and residents begin to envision a healthier rural future

We must amplify:

- **Places** where people live and work,
- **Personal** health,
- **Population** health,
- **Public** health
- **Political** will

Leading to enhanced **Prosperity**

“In these times, if “*I*”
is replaced with “*We*”, even
illness becomes wellness.”

We can only work towards a Healthier Rural America
together.

Contact Information

Phil Polakoff MD, MEnvSc, MPH

Founder/CEO, *A Healthier WE*

Consulting Professor, *Stanford University School of Medicine*

Affiliated Scholar, *Stanford University Bill Lane Center for the American West*

plp@sbcglobal.net

510 508 9216



Spirit, Hope, Energy