

PENNSTATE



PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF

Rural Health

2002-2003 Annual Report

The **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** (PORH) is committed to strengthening rural communities, fostering rural partnerships, supporting rural providers and advocating for the health of rural residents.

Pennsylvania, one of the most “rural” states in the nation, is home to nearly 2.8 million rural residents. Twenty-three percent of the state’s population live in areas that are designated as rural and, except for Philadelphia, every county in Pennsylvania has areas that are classified as rural. Forty-six of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties are predominantly rural and six counties are 100 percent rural. These areas differ culturally, economically and geographically from the urban and suburban parts of the state. They are areas populated by residents committed to their communities and to small town life.

On behalf of those residents, the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** advocates for equity in and access to quality health care. Through creative partnerships and collaborations, innovative planning and visionary leadership, rural communities of the Keystone State will continue to be strengthened. The **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** is proud to be part of those efforts.



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PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF *Rural Health*

Our Vision

The **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** will be recognized as the premier rural health care leadership and information organization in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and will strive to be one of the most effective state offices of rural health in the nation.

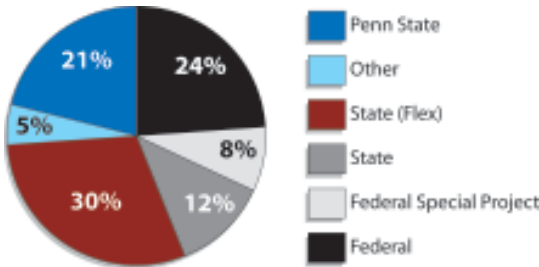
Our Mission

The mission of the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** is to enhance the health status of rural Pennsylvanians through outreach, education, advocacy, applied research and special projects.

To fulfill our mission, the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** will be:

- Recognized within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and by providers and consumers as the resource for linking and disseminating rural health information, outreach and extension and rural applied research;
- Considered to be the clearinghouse in Pennsylvania for rural health-related information;
- Viewed as a major provider of networking and coordination between and among organizations and individuals involved in enhancing the health status of rural Pennsylvanians.

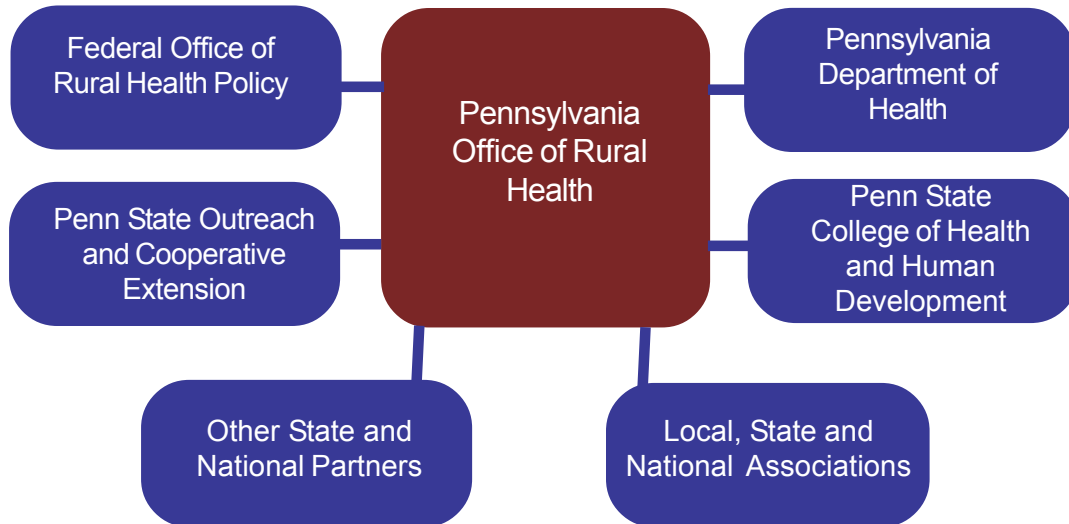
2002 - 2003 Fiscal Support



Sources of Funding

- Federal Office of Rural Health Policy,
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Pennsylvania Department of Health
- Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
- USDA - Extension Service
- Penn State Outreach
- Penn State Cooperative Extension

Partnering for Pennsylvania



Our continued viability and success are a reflection of the support of many organizations and the commitment and time of many individuals. Thank you for your support.

Activities

Through our activities, the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health** strives to:

- Strengthen the existing network of rural providers, planners and advocates by encouraging partnerships and identifying opportunities for collaboration and cooperation;
- Advocate for rural Pennsylvanians and raise awareness of rural health issues;
- Act as a liaison among academia, state and federal government, professional associations and health consumers;
- Compile, analyze and disseminate information to policy makers, health providers, health educators and health administrators;
- Conduct applied research into healthcare issues affecting rural Pennsylvanians.

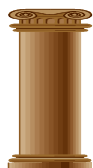
2002-2003 Accomplishments and Highlights

Advocacy

Advocating for the needs of rural residents is one of the highest priorities of PORH. During 2002 and 2003, PORH staff expanded and strengthened the office's impact by serving on national, state and local boards, committees, task forces and work groups. Our affiliations with the National Rural Health Association, the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health and the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association gave us voices at national and state levels, especially our participation in state groups focused on nutrition, women's health, aging, economic development, farm safety and more.

Education and Outreach

2003 Annual Rural Health Conference



In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association, Penn State Outreach, Penn State Cooperative Extension and our healthcare, economic development and agricultural partners, PORH coordinates the only conference in the state devoted exclusively to rural health. In 2003, nearly 200 rural health advocates attended the 11th annual rural health conference focused on **“The Foundations of Rural Health: Equity, Access and Quality.”** The 2004 conference, **“From Solo to Symphony: Connecting Rural Voices,”** will be held June 9 and 10 in State College, PA.

Migrant and Immigrant Health Conferences in Pennsylvania

PORH coordinates one of the only conferences in the state that addresses migrant and immigrant health and farm safety issues. These events are co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The 2004 conference, **“Migrant and Immigrant Health in Rural Pennsylvania: Harvesting Agricultural Health and Safety,”** is set for May 24 and 25, in State College, PA.

Our Quarterly Publication: *Pennsylvania Rural Health News*

PORH's newsletter highlights exciting and innovative rural health programs in the state; updates state and national legislation affecting rural health; shares news from the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Penn State Cooperative Extension; and provides a forum for the exchange of ideas on specific issues. Published quarterly, the newsletter is distributed to more than 5,000 rural health advocates in the state and throughout the nation. Back issues of the newsletter can be accessed at <http://porh.cas.psu.edu/pubs.shtml>.

Connecting via the Internet

PORH's Web site is a source of information for funding sources, rural health publications, state and national conferences, rural health links and a wide variety of articles on topics of interest to rural health providers. In 2002-2003, the Web site was accessed nearly 38,500 times, with visitors seeking information about our office, information on conferences and training, links to funding sources and more. The site is located at <http://porh.cas.psu.edu>.

Swimming Pool Pesticide Applicators Training and Certification Program

In partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Penn State Cooperative Extension, PORH continued to offer training and certification programs for individuals who apply chemicals to swimming pools as required under the Pennsylvania pesticide law. During the 2002-2003 fiscal year, 500 pesticide applicators were certified and 1,000 received recertification credits. Since 1996, more than 5,500 participants have been certified or recertified through training programs delivered via satellite and two-way interactive video to Penn State campuses and Cooperative Extension offices.

The Pennsylvania Agromedicine Program

PORH leads the education and outreach activities of the Pennsylvania Agromedicine Program, a partnership of health and agricultural professionals that promotes the health and safety of agricultural producers, workers, their families and consumers of agricultural products. This program is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Penn State's College of Medicine and PORH.

Bioterrorism and Emergency Preparedness Efforts

PORH has developed partnerships with the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Public Health Preparedness and Penn State Outreach to develop satellite downlink training programs for rural clinicians, first-responders, EMS personnel and public health staff. Work on these efforts continues in the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Special Programs and Projects

Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant Program and the Small Rural Hospital Improvement Grant Program

The Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health coordinates two grant programs focused on rural hospitals. In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, PORH co-directs the statewide implementation of the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility/Critical Access Hospital (Flex) program. This federal program is designed to help very small rural hospitals qualify for cost-based reimbursement through Medicare. **By the end of the 2002-2003 fiscal year, six (of a total of seven) hospitals in Pennsylvania converted to Critical Access Hospital (CAH) status,** with our assistance.



With Flex grant funds, these hospitals embarked on a performance improvement program designed specifically for small rural hospitals using the Balanced Scorecard methodology. The Flex Grant program has funded a number of information system upgrades for these hospitals, giving them the capability to network with larger health systems with more robust information technology and provide connectivity with local physicians. Emergency medical services training and rural patient referral protocol development have also been supported.

The Small Rural Hospital Improvement Grant Program provided grant funds to 12 small (fewer than 49 beds) rural hospitals to assist them with HIPAA and Prospective Payment implementation and to initiate or enhance quality improvement efforts.

Rural Health Works

In collaboration with Penn State Cooperative Extension, PORH participates in this national program that works with community healthcare and economic development leaders to demonstrate the importance of the healthcare sector on the local economy. In 2002-2003, meetings were held in selected communities where the Rural Health Works tools were put into practice. These efforts continue in the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Applied Research Efforts

Investigating Rural Health Issues

PORH staff continued to focus on salient rural health issues with **Dental Service Supply and Demand for the Indigent Populations in Rural Pennsylvania**, which combined Medicaid and state license data with surveys of school nurses in rural areas of the state to assess the distribution of dental providers and the impact on rural youth. Together with East Stroudsburg University, our project partner, recommendations from the study were developed and forwarded to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The project was funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

PORH also collaborated with the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford's Center for Rural Health Practice on the effects of home healthcare reimbursement on rural agencies and their beneficiaries. Combining state-level data collected in 2002 as part of another Center for Rural Pennsylvania-funded project with data collected in two counties in northwestern Pennsylvania, PORH and the center made recommendations to federal legislators about the effects of reimbursement methodologies on rural home health providers and their beneficiaries.

Loan Repayment Program and J-1 Visa Waiver Program Surveys

The State Loan Repayment Program encourages primary care practitioners, including dentists, to practice in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) and provides payments of educational loan obligations based on the length of time the practitioner practices in the HPSA. The J-1 Visa Waiver Program may waive exchange visitor visa requirements for an international medical graduate completing primary care training in the United in exchange for an agreement to practice in a HPSA. Under the direction of the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Bureau of Health Planning, PORH conducted annual surveys of program participants and site administrators to gather data on the effectiveness of these programs in recruiting and retaining primary care providers in rural and underserved areas of the state and to determine compliance with program guidelines.



Committee Participation and Advocacy

During the fiscal year, PORH staff served on a variety of task forces, committees and advisory boards designed to promote the issues of rural health, healthcare workforce issues, nutrition, special populations, health programs and rural development.

- National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health Board of Directors
- National Rural Health Association State Office Council
- National Rural Health Association State Association Council
- National Rural Health Association State Rural Health Association Technical Assistance Committee
- National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health “Flex” Program Committee
- Rural Health Works National Steering Committee
- Pennsylvania Rural Health Association Board of Directors
- Pennsylvania Rural Development Council
- University of Pittsburgh at Bradford’s Center for Rural Health Practice Board of Directors
- Pennsylvania Department of Health Bioterrorism and Emergency Preparedness Statewide Advisory Group
- Pennsylvania Department of Aging’s PrimeTime Health Statewide Advisory Committee
- Pennsylvania Nutrition Education Network Statewide Steering Committee
- Pennsylvania Recruitment and Retention Loan Repayment Program Review Committee
- Quality Insights of Pennsylvania Community Advisory Committee
- AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians Advisory Committee
- Family Health Council of Central Pennsylvania Board of Directors
- Penn State Rural Women’s Health Initiative
- Penn State’s *Creating Health* Steering Committee

Our Future

For the future, the **Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health’s** efforts will focus on:

- Expanding the breadth and scope of programming offered statewide, including conferences, workshops and distance education programs.
- Providing input into the state’s legislative agenda by engaging in policy research and working closely with the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association.
- Expanding skills in community development and working effectively with state, regional and county-based Community and Economic Development specialists, Area Health Education Centers and community health improvement partnerships to better assist in the development and enhancement of rural health networks.
- Extending advanced technology, information services and quality improvement techniques to Critical Access Hospitals and their communities.
- Attracting new partners and building additional working relationships.

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