

CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS



Health Care

& *Rural America*

We are working to reform health care so that it works for everyone -- including rural people, small business owners and their employees and family farmers and ranchers. **Will you join us?**

Why does it matter?

Rural America presents a unique set of challenges for health care reform. Rural people are more likely to be self-employed or work in a small business. As a result, rural people have lower rates of employer-provided benefits and are more likely to be underinsured or uninsured for longer periods of time.

Health care is also a major barrier to rural small business development, the most effective path in many communities for low and moderate income rural people to pull themselves out of poverty. If we hope to create genuine economic opportunity for rural Americans through entrepreneurship, we must reform the health care system. Health care reform that works for all of America will spur entrepreneurial rural development and stimulate our rural economy.

Today, rural people have less access to health care providers, greater rates of disability and chronic diseases and higher use rates of all public health care programs. The 60 million people in rural America are the most in need of health care reform. They also have much to contribute to the reform debate.

What can I do?

Take action: www.cfra.org/09/health-care

Stay connected: www.cfra.org/signup

Contact: Steph Larsen, StephL@cfra.org, 402.687.2100

Learn more

Visit www.cfra.org/policy/health-care to access more information, including our recent policy reports on rural issues in health care.

Be sure to explore other parts of our website as well, including sections about community development, entrepreneurship, beginning farmer and rancher opportunities, and rural and agricultural policy. You can also sign up for our free monthly newsletter and read our Blog for Rural America at www.cfra.org/blog.



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Making Health Care Work for Rural People

Rural people face many of the same health care challenges confronting the rest of the nation in addition to unique rural challenges. This is a list of 10 points we think are important in the rural health care debate.

- 1. Universal, Continuous and Affordable:** Because of the long-term consequences of being uninsured and underinsured, health care coverage must be available to everyone, without gaps in coverage. Health care must also be cost-effective for individuals, businesses and society.
- 2. Self Employment & Small Businesses:** Owner-operated farms, ranches and small businesses dominate the rural economy. Reform must provide options – including a public health insurance option – for small businesses and the self-employed. This will bolster entrepreneurial rural development.
- 3. An Aging Population:** Many rural areas are experiencing an aging population, and with it an increase in chronic diseases, disability, and pressure on an already burdened health care system. Reform must provide the services and facilities to enable aging rural people to stay in their homes and communities.
- 4. Dependence on Public Plans:** With a population that is older, poorer and with less employer-based health insurance, more rural people are dependent on public health care programs such as state children's health insurance programs, Medicare, and Medicaid. Reform must strengthen these public plans.
- 5. Health Infrastructure:** Rural health infrastructure is a web of small hospitals and clinics often experiencing financial stress. Reform must provide these facilities with resources to update their technology, provide care to the unserved and underserved, and must address their current funding model.
- 6. Healthcare Providers:** Over 80% of rural counties are medically underserved, over a third of rural Americans live with a shortage of health professionals, and only 3% of current medical students plan to practice in rural areas. Reform must offer new approaches and incentives for rural health professionals.
- 7. Health, Wellness & Prevention:** Rather than treating just sickness, our health care system must focus on wellness and prevention as well. This is particularly true for rural areas that suffer higher rates of obesity and other preventable problems. Reform must do more to enhance and promote health and wellness.
- 8. Mental Health:** Over half the counties in the United States have no mental health professionals. Reform must create incentives to provide resources for a specialty rural mental health marketplace similar to what exists for rural medical clinics.
- 9. Emergency Services:** Emergency medical services (EMS) are first-line health care providers in rural areas. Rural EMS providers are underfunded, face growing demand, and workforce and volunteer shortages. Reform legislation must provide resources to make these vital EMS services sustainable.
- 10. Health Technology:** Technology is increasingly used to improve patient safety, quality of care, and efficiency. However, adoption of health information and telehealth technology remains low in rural areas. Reform must include resources for health technology, and efforts to close the rural broadband gap.

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For more research and reports on rural American and health care reform,
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