



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Alabama celebrates first National Rural Health Day on Nov. 17

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Unique health care challenges face America's 62 million rural citizens, including almost 2 million Alabamians. To highlight these important health care challenges and to showcase the importance of rural communities, the Alabama Department of Public Health's Office of Primary Care and Rural Health joins other rural health advocates nationally and locally to celebrate the first National Rural Health Day on Thursday, Nov. 17.

Rural communities in Alabama face unique health care needs. Today more than ever before, Alabama must address accessibility issues, a lack of health care providers, the needs of an aging population suffering from a greater number of chronic conditions, and larger percentages of underinsured and uninsured citizens. Consider the following:

- An additional 1,785,000 annual office visits to primary care providers will be needed in Alabama by 2025.
- A 79.6 percent increase in the elderly population (age 65 and older) in rural Alabama is anticipated between 2000 and 2025.
- Rural residents born today are expected to have a life span that is more than six months shorter than their urban counterparts'.
- Rural hospitals are frequently one of the largest employers in a community – meaning the financial stability of a small rural hospital also has a tremendous impact on a community's economic health.
- Accessible health care is a vital component of economic development in rural communities.

While challenges exist, Alabama has many initiatives that are focused on improving access to health care in rural and underserved communities, including the following:

- The Alabama Rural Development Office is focused on expanding the use of telehealth in rural hospitals, community health centers, nursing homes, and schools to bring specialty medical care to rural areas.
- The Rural Medical Scholars program at the University of Alabama and the Rural Medicine Program at Auburn University encourage rural students to practice primary care in rural and underserved communities throughout Alabama.
- The Alabama Office of Primary Care and Rural Health offers scholarship and loan repayment programs to primary care providers who choose to practice in health professional shortage areas.

- Safety net providers such as rural hospitals, federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, county health departments, and volunteer free clinics provide primary care services to vulnerable populations who would otherwise not have their health care needs met.

As the first annual Rural Health Day is observed, Alabama citizens have the opportunity to “Celebrate the Power of Rural” and support health care programs in their communities that provide not only health care services but also contribute to the economic security of rural communities.

More information about health care and educational opportunities in rural Alabama can be found on the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health website at <http://www.adph.org/ruralhealth/>

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