



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama to celebrate National Rural Health Day Nov. 19

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Office of Primary Care and Rural Health (OPCRH) will join the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) and other state/national rural stakeholders in celebrating National Rural Health Day on Thursday, Nov. 19, 2015.

NOSORH created National Rural Health Day as a way to showcase rural America; increase awareness of rural health-related issues; and promote the efforts of NOSORH, State Offices of Rural Health and others in addressing those issues.

Nationwide, approximately 62 million people – nearly one in five Americans – live in rural and frontier communities throughout the United States. “These small towns, farming communities and frontier areas are wonderful places to live and work; they are places where neighbors know each other and work together,” notes NOSORH Director Teryl Eisinger. “The hospitals and providers serving these rural communities not only provide quality patient care, but they also help keep good jobs in rural America.”

These communities also face unique health care needs. “Today more than ever, rural communities must tackle 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 un- and underinsured citizens,” Eisinger says. “Meanwhile, rural hospitals are threatened with declining reimbursement rates and disproportionate funding levels that makes it challenging to serve their residents.”

In Alabama, five rural hospitals have closed in the past five years, and many have been forced to reduce services. In 1980, 45 of Alabama’s 54 rural counties provided obstetrical delivery services, but today only 17 of those counties provide these services.

The hospital in Valley, Ala., recently announced it will discontinue delivering babies at the end of this year. Another problem faced by Alabama’s rural counties is a shortage of physicians and dentists. Currently, 62 of Alabama’s counties lack sufficient primary care physicians, and virtually all 67 counties lack sufficient mental health and dental care providers.

“The OPCRH is proud to be working with programs that help overcome some of these problems and make life better for rural Alabamians,” Chuck Lail, director said. “One program, the National Health Service Corps, provides education funds that facilitate approximately 103 health

providers working in Alabama today. These providers include family practice physicians, nurse practitioners and registered nurses.”

Another program, the J-1 Visa Waiver, enables approximately 90 highly trained primary care and specialist physicians from other countries to practice in Alabama’s rural medically underserved communities. Still other programs provide financial and technical assistance to enable rural hospitals to adopt new communications and health technology.

State Offices of Rural Health play a key role in addressing the unique needs of their respective states. All 50 states maintain a State Office of Rural Health, each of which shares a similar mission: to foster relationships, disseminate information and provide technical assistance that improves access to, and the quality of, health care for its rural citizens. In the past year alone, these offices collectively provided technical assistance to more than 28,000 rural communities.

Additional information about National Rural Health Day can be found on the Web at www.celebratepowerofrural.org. To learn more about NOSORH, visit www.nosorh.org; to learn more about the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, visit adph.org/ruralhealth.