2022 State of the Union Initial NRHA Statement

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is excited to hear the policies outlined in President Biden's first State of the Union tonight. Of note, NRHA supports the Administration's Unity Agenda to bring together all parts of our nation to address disparities among our citizens.

NRHA has been pleased to see a focus on rural communities in **activities early** in the President's term, recognizing that for too long rural communities have faced underinvestment and persistent poverty. Significant investments in rural through the American Rescue plan and Bipartisan Infrastructure plan include addressing rural health coverage gaps, keeping rural hospitals open, rural healthcare workforce shortages, as well as maintaining and expanding telehealth. These are in line with NRHA's advocacy focus since the onset of the Biden Presidency, and we're excited to hear additional details about future proposals.

Tonight, President Biden is expected to discuss his **new strategy** to address the national mental health crisis. Rural America suffers from the effects of long-standing rural shortages of specialty mental health services, long travel distances to obtain treatment, and stigma and cultural/ societal attitudes about efforts to ensure access to the full range of behavioral health services. This fall, **NRHA provided comments** to the Senate Finance Committee's request for information on mental health care. Upon initial review of the President's proposed mental health strategy, NRHA is pleased to see many of our recommendations reflected in this new initiative especially around investing in a strong behavioral health workforce, integration of behavioral health and primary care, and addressing the opioid crisis.

NRHA looks forward to tonight's State of the Union underscoring the needed emphasis on rural health care and to continuing work with the Administration and Congress to ensure that rural communities have access to critical health care they need and deserve.