

The Future of Rural Health: Shared Rural Health Values

Rural America represents a unique and diverse set of populations, cultures, and geographies across the country. Local rural health care environments have evolved to meet the needs of their respective communities, meaning there is no universal or one-size-fits-all solutions to the difficult challenges of improving rural health. For more than 40 years, NRHA has helped rural providers and patients overcome these challenges and highlight innovation by providing leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research. Given their small size and resilient nature rural communities can be hubs for innovation approaches to improving health across the United States.

To achieve this, the NRHA has several guiding values¹:

Community Driven: Local communities have the primary responsibility for addressing community needs and determining their desirable model of care, as well as the knowledge of what is feasible and sustainable in their community. The advancement of community responsibility is a necessary element of addressing rural community health improvement and sustaining local health services.

Adequate Healthcare Workforce: Services cannot be delivered to rural populations without an adequate rural health care workforce, including a comprehensive array of clinicians, health administration, technicians, aides, and inclusive of behavioral and allied health.

Coverage: Ensure access to healthcare coverage for people living in rural areas. Rural health care must be affordable for consumers, employers, and taxpayers as an economic and societal imperative.

Local Access to Care: Rural residents should have access to treatment, prevention, and educational resources as close to their homes as possible, where services can be provided with high quality, at a reasonable cost, and that is congruent with their needs.

Addressing the Social and Environmental Drivers of Health: Improving rural health requires a holistic view of health, and strategies that address not only health care services delivery but also the social determinants of health, focusing on a goal of achieving health equity.

Specialty Care: Not all services can appropriately be available in all communities. Nonetheless, rural communities should have access to a core or fundamental set of specialty care services. These services can be provided in diverse settings, by a variety of providers. Some of these services may be provided with remote access technologies or other modalities.

Integrated Systems: The rural health systems must integrate physical, behavioral, oral, and public health services to be equitable.

Data Driven Public Health: Rural public health strategies are an essential to improving rural health. Rural health strategies must be data driven, utilizing population-based data on health status, behaviors, delivery, outcomes, and social determinants of health.

Rural Economic Viability: Health is a necessary component of community economic development. The rural health care system is a contributing factor in communities' ability to attract and sustain a desirable rural workforce and thus, to attract employers.

¹ Values are beliefs and opinions that people hold regarding specific issues or ideas. These are subjective, and they may change as demands or needs change.