



**National Rural
Health Association**
Rural Health Access Conference
May 19-20, 2025 — Atlanta, GA

Monday, May 19

1 – 1:15 p.m.

Conference Welcome

Alan Morgan, MPA, NRHA CEO

Mary-Katherine Smith McNatt, DrPH, MPH, NRHA Health Equity Council Chair

1:15 – 2:30 p.m.

Opening Plenary

Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative: A Rural Health Equity Model

Cristin Brawner, Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative, Project Coordinator

Arturo Menefee, PhD in Public Policy & Administration, University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, Interim Executive Director

The Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative equips youth and adults with the skills, tools, and resources to improve health outcomes in 20 Alabama communities, primarily in rural, tribal, and unincorporated areas. Through community-based Advisory Groups and Youth Community Councils, residents leverage local assets to address health challenges in culturally sensitive ways. Join us for this interactive session, where Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative team members will share promising practices and lessons learned from the Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative model.

2:30 – 2:45 p.m.

Networking Break, Poster Session

2:45 – 4 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

1A. Bridging Gaps to Advance Maternal Health Equity in Rural Communities

Jacquelyn Alvarado, DNP, Texas A&M University Rural Community Health Institute, Director, Rural Maternal Health

Angie Alaniz, BA, Texas A&M University Rural Community Health Institute, Director of Operations

Explore the power of collaboration in transforming rural maternal health through comprehensive assessment, community engagement, and actionable planning. This session highlights successful initiatives from West Virginia and the San Carlos Apache Reservation, showcasing how assessments, resource alignment, and stakeholder engagement address barriers to care. Participants will gain insights into effective strategies for assembling multidisciplinary partnerships that design and implement impactful solutions for underserved, multiracial, and multicultural rural populations.

Indigenous maternal health in rural US communities

Katy Kozhimannil, PhD, MPA, University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Distinguished McKnight University Professor

Julia Interrante, PhD, MPH, Rural Health Research Center; University of Minnesota, Research Fellow/Statistical Lead
Clara Busse, PhD, MPH, Rural Health Research Center; University of Minnesota, Postdoctoral Associate

This session will focus on maternal health for American Indian/Alaska Native (Indigenous) people living in rural US communities. It will describe the historical context for current inequities, explain the federal trust responsibility to Native nations, and provide specific, in-depth examples of new research findings that relate to maternal mortality, syphilis, and access to perinatal health care for Indigenous birthing people. Discussion will focus on challenges and opportunities for improving maternal health equity for Indigenous people.

1B. Advancing Leadership for Health Equity

Marleny Garber, MPH, Stratis Health, Program Manager

Sarah Brinkman, MBA, MA, CPHQ, Stratis Health, Senior Program Manager

To make health care more accessible and equitable, health care leaders must understand population health and be culturally competent for the rural communities they serve. Concepts that create actionable plans for embedding strong, equitable roles and processes are essential to advancing leadership at all levels. Participants will gain strategies to engage boards in health equity efforts, develop processes for effective community engagement, and enhance communication to address key population health concepts and value-based care models.

Strategies for Discussing Health Equity in Rural Settings

Casey Balio, PhD, East Tennessee State University Center for Rural Health and Research, Research Assistant Professor

Morgan McDonald, MD, Milbank Memorial Fund, National Director for Population Health and Health Equity Leadership

Kayla Alvis, PhD, MS, East Tennessee State University Center for Rural Health and Research, Research Assistant Professor

This session will describe findings from focus groups with experts from across the country on their experiences, barriers, and strategies for discussing topics related to health equity in rural settings. Actionable strategies will include framing, language use, and how to prepare for conversations with various audiences around what are increasingly politically charged topics. This session may be of interest to organizational leaders, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners.

1C. Heart-Healthy Murder Mysteries: Rural Elder Health and Belonging

Marybeth (MB) Mitcham, PhD, MPH, George Mason University, Assistant Professor and Director Online MPH Program

To address the co-occurring problems of chronic diseases and loneliness among rural elders, community-focused innovative initiatives, like heart-health lectures combined with murder mystery luncheons, foraging and nature identification walks, and recipe exploration classes were held at a rural senior center. These events were a success, resulting in seniors' self-reported behavioral changes contributing to their improved health outcomes and sense of belonging. This model was successfully duplicated in other rural senior centers with the same results.

Artful Immunity: Vaccine Confidence through Creative Connection

Bridget McCarthy, M.S., Out of Hand Theater, Community Engagement Manager

Briana Smith, MPH, Performance Hypothesis, Project Manager

Learn how a unique partnership between Out of Hand Theater, the Centers for Disease Control Foundation, and the Georgia Department of Public Health transformed COVID-19 vaccine conversations in rural Georgia. Initially focused on rural Black Georgians and now expanding to Spanish-speaking Latino communities, this program blends art with open dialogue to build trust and health equity. Leave with actionable tips to integrate arts into your own health literacy programs for greater impact.

4 – 4:15 p.m.

Networking Break, Poster Session

4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Concurrent Session

2A. Impact of Immigration Status on Rural Health Outcomes

Emily Sinnwell, DNP, ARNP, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, The University of Iowa College of Nursing, Clinical Assistant Professor

Andrea Achenbach, DNP, ARNP, FNP-C, University of Iowa College of Nursing, Clinical Assistant Professor

This presentation highlights how immigration status influences health outcomes in rural Iowa, emphasizing social determinants of health. We report on data from a survey of 481 immigrants and refugees that identified structural barriers to healthcare access, economic stability, education, housing, and social support. Recommendations to improve health outcomes for these vulnerable populations are set forth. Highlighting these social determinants informs policies and interventions that promote health equity for immigrant populations in underserved areas.

Promoting Health Equity in Border Hispanic Communities

Shiloh Williams, PhD, RN, San Diego State University, Assistant Professor

Candace Juhala, BS, San Diego State University, Research Assistant

This session will examine the intersection of health literacy, status, and access among Hispanic and Spanish-speaking populations in unincorporated communities along the California-Mexico border. Participants will explore how low health literacy, chronic illness, and limited access to care impact underserved, low-income communities. The session will highlight community-driven, academic responsive strategies to address health equity gaps, focusing on practical solutions to improve health literacy and access, ultimately fostering better outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

2B. Mental Health Integration Strategies to Improve Health Equity

John Gale, MS, Maine Rural Health Research Center, Senior Research Associate

Chronic shortages of mental health (MH) services negatively impact access to care for people living in rural communities. As a result, rural people experience higher rates of untreated MH issues. People with untreated MH issues typically use greater levels of medical and emergency department services. Participants will learn practical strategies to integrate MH services in general medical settings and gain access to tools and resources to support their efforts to reduce disparities in MH access.

Access to Behavioral Health Care for Rural Patients

Amanda Gmyrek, PhD, JBS International, Inc. - North Bethesda, MD, Director, Clinical Advancement Impact Center

Suzanne Kinsky, PhD, MPH, JBS International, Inc. - North Bethesda, MD, Senior Research Associate

Theresa Norton, PhD, MBA, JBS International, Inc. - North Bethesda, MD, Senior Research Associate

HRSA's Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) and Maternal Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder (MMHSUD) programs provide behavioral health (BH) consultation, care coordination services, and training to health professionals to improve access to BH care. This presentation will discuss interim evaluation findings about barriers and facilitators of connecting rural versus non-rural patients to BH and social services. Data come from interviews and surveys with program directors, care coordinators, and health professionals.

2C. Advancing Oral Health: The Role of Community Dental Health Coordinators in Rural Communities

Amah Riley, PhD, Joni Nelson, PhD, MS, Amy Martin, DrPH

This session will explore the Community Dental Health Coordinator (CDHC) role, its importance in advancing oral health equity in rural communities, and key curriculum components. We'll explore how certification, standardization, and participation build value, contribute to evidence-based practice, and advance recognition and reimbursement—similar to CHWs—helping integrate CDHCs into the broader healthcare system.

Tuesday, May 20

7 – 8 a.m.

Continental Breakfast

Poster Session

8:00 – 9:15 a.m.

Opening Plenary

9:15 – 9:30 a.m.

Networking Break, Poster Session

9:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions

3A. Rural Maternal Health: Identifying Actions through Partnerships

Kaarin Lund, MPH, National Rural Health Resource Center, Lead Program Specialist

Kellie McGinness Kubena, MS, United States Department of Agriculture, USDA Rural Health Liaison

Angie Alaniz, Texas A&M Rural and Community Health Institute, Director of Operations

The United States Department of Agriculture, and Health Resources and Services Administration, and three Rural Partners Networks collaborated to give moms and babies their best chance to be healthy and thrive. Technical assistance providers conducted regional, inclusive community assessments, and led onsite action planning for prioritized areas for local implementation teams to move these diverse projects forward to improve maternal health. Resources will be shared for rural communities to address maternal health care needs.

3B. Sustainability Planning Coaching with Frontier/Rural Health Departments

Rachel Baker, MSc, MA, OMNI Institute, Research Manager

This session reflects on sustainability planning techniques tailored for rural and frontier health departments. Participants will explore practical approaches, including customized templates and coaching strategies, addressing unique challenges in these communities. The session emphasizes creating accessible, community-driven resources that foster engagement and equity. Through insights and examples from the project, participants will gain tools to implement sustainable practices that drive impactful outcomes and advance long-term health equity in rural settings.

Assessment to Action through the Tennessee Vitality Toolkit

Hannah Duiven, M.Ed., Tennessee Department of Health, Special Projects Manager

Brittany Gutierrez-Kitto, MPH, Tennessee Department of Health, Special Projects Coordinator

This presentation will introduce the Tennessee Vitality Toolkit, an assessment to action resource designed to support local County Health Councils address health equity and the social determinants of health. As a predominantly rural state, Health Councils in Tennessee are key change agents for healthy communities. The resource provides Tennessee-specific data, evidence-based resources and strategies, and local success stories to help Health Councils overcome barriers, fostering equitable, community-driven health improvements focused on health equity.

3C. Practical Health Equity Strategies for Rural Providers

John Gale, MS, Maine Rural Health Research Center, Senior Research Associate and Director of Policy Engagement

COVID-19 highlighted inequities in healthcare access and outcomes among marginalized rural populations. This session presents a health equity toolkit containing practical strategies aligned with the five-domain Hospital Commitment to Health Equity measure. The Flex Monitoring Team toolkit was developed to help rural providers build leadership, workforce, and data collection and analysis capacity to drive and document health equity

improvement. We will explore strategies implemented by rural providers and offer resources to support their efforts.

Redesigning Community Care for Women Veterans in Rural Settings

Shannon Davila, MSN, ECRI, Executive Director Total Systems Safety, Program Lead, SALUTE

Sandra Soloski, Adagio Health, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives Women Veterans Project Coordinator

Women make up an increasingly large share of the U.S. veteran population, yet programs designed to support veterans' health and well-being have largely focused on men. This health inequity is further amplified in rural settings where access to appropriate care and resources is limited. This presentation will highlight novel approaches to identifying needs of this often-underserved population and strategies to redesign and provide the best support possible for the health and well-being of women veterans.

10:45 – 11:00 a.m.

Networking Break, Poster Session

11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Concurrent Session

4A. Elevating Rural Disability Data for Impact

Alexis Weaver, MS, Urban Institute, Policy Program Manager

Lillie Greiman, MA, Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities, Project Director

Violet Sulka/Hewes, BA, The Urban Institute, Research Analyst

Gaps in rural disability data limit the ability of researchers, disability leaders, policymakers, and service providers to make informed decisions to improve the lives of disabled people and the communities where they live. Urban Institute and Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities hosted conversations exploring these challenges and the effects on rural disabled people's experiences. This session highlights lessons learned and offers recommendations for centering disability perspectives in data collection and interpretation.

Diagnostic Delays in Multiple Sclerosis: Rural Health Disparities

Afsaneh Shirani, MD, MSCI, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Assistant Professor of Neurology

This presentation explores diagnostic delays in multiple sclerosis (MS), emphasizing disparities in rural areas. The session will examine the MS diagnostic landscape, analyze disparities' impact on rural populations, and review three real-world cases illustrating delayed diagnosis consequences. The session also highlights cognitive biases in clinical decision-making that exacerbate diagnostic delays. Attendees will gain tools and insights to recognize and address factors contributing to MS diagnostic delays, ultimately improving outcomes for patients in underserved rural communities.

4B. Lifelines of Care: CHWs Making a Difference

David Jordan, MPA, United, President

Ton Mirás Neira, Senior Specialist in Sign Language Interpretation, University of Kansas Medical Center, Community Health Worker Project Manager

Leah Gagnon, MPH, Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas, Director of Inspire Health Foundation

Community Health Workers have a profound impact on individuals and families. The University of Kansas Medical Center developed a documentary that captures the journey of CHWs in Kansas, sharing narratives that unveil barriers faced by communities and the unwavering support from CHWs to overcome them. We propose airing this 45-minute film, followed by a panel discussion about supporting CHWs in rural communities, health impacts, and successful efforts to establish policies that support CHWs' long-term sustainability.

4C. What is rural America's barbershop?

Chris Longenecker, MD, University of Washington, Professor of Medicine & Global Health

Joseph Ravenell, MD, New York University Grossman School of Medicine, Associate Professor of Medicine & Population Health

Sarah Masyuko, MBChB, PhD, University of Washington, Assistant Professor of Global Health

The American Heart Association's Rural PRO-CARE Health Equity Research Network will present experiences in community-based care delivery in urban and global settings that are informing the development of a community-based model of hypertension care in rural America. Lead presenters will discuss the Black Barbershop model of pharmacist-driven hypertension care in US cities and differentiated service delivery models of HIV care in Africa. The audience will participate in discussion of "What is Rural America's Barbershop?"

Rural Complications and Benefits of REACH Grants

Bryan Price, BA, Virginia Rural Health Association, Program Coordinator

Cynthia Poteat, Virginia Rural Health Association, Nutrition Coordinator

Roshay Richardson, Virginia Rural Health Association, Breast Feeding Coordinator

The Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health Grant targets racial and ethnic minorities disproportionately affected by chronic diseases. By increasing access to healthy food and physical activity, the program empowers communities to make healthier choices. This reduces health disparities, improves overall health, and prevents chronic diseases. However, rural challenges include limited resources, healthcare access, transportation barriers, and cultural sensitivity in program design and implementation.

12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Networking Lunch

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Plenary Presentation

Disenfranchised and Unheard: Political Determinants of Indigenous Health

Mary-Katherine McNatt, DrPH, MPH, ATSU, Professor, Public Health Department

Marsha Presley, PhD, MPH, ATSU, Research Associate & Adjunct Faculty

Janice C. Probst, MS, PhD, University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health, Distinguished Professor Emerita

This presentation explores the political determinants of health affecting the outcomes of rural Indigenous communities. Focusing on issues that affect the ability to vote on tribal lands, we highlight how disenfranchisement contributes to health disparities. We'll examine these determinants, including underfunded healthcare services, limitations on tribal sovereignty, and environmental policies affecting tribal lands. The session aims to shed light on policy-driven barriers and how to advocate for changes to improve health equity for Native Americans.

2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

Networking Break, Poster Session

2:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Concurrent Session

5A: 25 Years in the Making - How funding for and in the Louisiana Delta Region has transformed Communities and Improved Health Outcomes

5B. Leveraging Hubs to Align Health and Social Care

Jessica Machler, USAGing, Senior Program Manager, Rural Health & Social Engagement

Jeremiah Silguero, MPH, Partnership to Align Social Care, Senior Manager

Join us for an engaging session showcasing Community Care Hubs (CCHs) that connect community-based organizations with healthcare partners to promote health equity and improve care coordination in rural, frontier, and Tribal communities. Discover how CCHs bridge gaps between local service providers and healthcare organizations such as rural health clinics and hospitals. Presenters will highlight resources and support for organizations that strive to integrate health and social care and influence positive change in underserved communities.

Transforming Rural Access: Innovative Solutions for Addressing Health Disparities

Colleen Rodriguez, MSW, MPH, Calaveras County Public Health, Deputy Director, Public Health

Rural communities face significant challenges in accessing essential goods, services, and information due to limited infrastructure, geographic distances, and multigenerational poverty. Combined with mistrust of government and little/no internet, these realities exacerbate socioeconomic and health disparities. This presentation explores how a low resource, high need, rural jurisdiction in California addresses these health disparities through innovative health promotion and access initiatives including the use of a no cost vending machine, mobile phone application, and naloxone stations.

5C. Piloting violence intervention programming in rural SC communities

Christa Green, MPH, Medical University of South Carolina, Program Director, Turning the Tide Violence Intervention Program

Hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) traditionally serve urban communities with geographically concentrated interpersonal firearm violence, despite rural communities experiencing higher rates overall. This session will explore how a South Carolina HVIP piloted an expansion of services to support rural victims of violence. Findings on feasibility, efficacy, and sustainability, as well as future implications will be discussed. Additionally, strategies and lessons learned from related capacity-building efforts at a rural South Carolina trauma center will be shared.

Promoting Equitable Sexual Assault Care through Telehealth

Sheridan Miyamoto, PhD, FNP, RN, FAAN, The Pennsylvania State University, Associate Professor in the Ross and Carol Nese College of Nursing and the Principal Investigator and Director of the SAFE-T Center
Cynthia Bittner, BS, RN, SANE-P, The Pennsylvania State University, Assistant Director of the SAFE-T Center

The Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Telehealth (SAFE-T) System streamlines specialized sexual assault (SA) care by assisting hospitals in establishing or maintaining a dedicated response. SAFE-T offers comprehensive training, 24/7 expert SA nurse examiner (SANE) consultation, and program support, alleviating the burden on rural healthcare providers. These resources boost local nurse confidence, expertise, and expand the SANE workforce. We will highlight successful partnerships where SAFE-T provides interdisciplinary support to hospitals in rural and medically underserved locations.

4:00 – 5:15 p.m.

Plenary Presentation

SDOH: Bridging the Gap Between Healthcare and Public Health in Rural Communities

Eisha Khan, ALM, MPH, MaineHealth, Program Manager
Dora Mills, MD, MPH, FAAP, MaineHealth, Chief Health Improvement Officer
Naomi Schucker, MPH, MaineHealth, AVP

Join MaineHealth, the largest healthcare system in the nation's most rural state, to explore our approach to addressing social determinants of health. Learn how trauma-informed care, universal screening, data transparency and statewide partnerships are transforming healthcare access in rural areas, particularly for marginalized communities. Our approach serves as a nexus between healthcare and public health. We will showcase our two-

fold strategy: screening for health-related social needs and building statewide partnership to improve underlining SDOH needs.

5:15 p.m.

Conference Adjourns

Thank you for your attendance and your continued support of NRHA! Join us next year in San Diego, CA on May 18-19, 2026.