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Rural health crisis brings advocates to Washington

Washington, D.C. – A record number of rural health advocates are coming to Capitol Hill Feb. 11-13 in response to growing evidence that rural America faces a worsening health crisis, including higher mortality rates and less access to care. As rural hospital closures continue to escalate, with more closing in 2019 than any of the past 15 years, the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) calls on Congress and the Administration to act swiftly.

During NRHA’s 31st Rural Health Policy Institute – the largest rural advocacy event in the country – more than 500 rural health care providers and advocates will ask Congress and the Administration to end the catastrophic rural hospital closure crisis, mitigate the increasing mortality gap between rural and urban America, and improve health care workforce shortages.

“Now, more than ever, the voice of rural America is being heard,” says NRHA CEO Alan Morgan. “Rural America is facing a national health crisis, and it’s time that Washington listens.”

Since 2010, 121 rural hospitals have closed, and hundreds more are at risk. 46 percent of rural hospitals operate at a financial loss, up from 36 percent five years ago, according to Chartis Group data. The rate of closures has steadily increased since devastating Medicare cuts, a lack of Medicaid expansion in certain states, and a dearth of private plan competition coupled with exorbitant deductibles in ACA exchanges left rural providers without adequate compensation for care.

When rural hospitals close, they rarely reopen, and rural patients are left without emergency room access. Because rural hospitals are often one of the largest employers in rural communities, when they close approximately 20 percent of the rural economy vanishes. Medical deserts often form where populations are older, poorer, and sicker. According to a January 2017 CDC report, the mortality gap between rural and urban America is widening, with many rural populations’ life expectancy rates on a tragic decline.

NRHA’s Rural Health Policy Institute will be held Feb. 11-13 at the Hilton Washington, D.C. National Mall. Members of Congress will speak to more than 500 rural health stakeholders and those same administrators and providers will visit congressional offices to relay unique rural stories to their elected officials.

Additionally, NRHA has partnered with the American Heart Association and American Academy of Family Physicians to host the 2020 Rural Health Disparities Summit on Feb. 13, the final day of NRHA’s D.C. events.

Review [materials outlining NRHA's advocacy requests](#) and find out [who we are and what we'll fight for in 2020](#).

NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and providing leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research. NRHA membership consists of more than 21,000 individuals and organizations.

For more information or to learn more about NRHA, visit ruralhealthweb.org