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## **National Rural Health Association**

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### **NRHA announces 2024 Rural Health Award recipients**

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is proud to announce the association's 2024 Rural Health Award recipients. NRHA's Rural Health Awards are given each year to individuals and organizations in the field of rural health who have dedicated their time and talents to improving the health and well-being of others. The winners will be honored during NRHA's 47th Annual Rural Health Conference May 7-10 in New Orleans.

"We're extremely proud of this year's winners, who have found creative ways to survive and thrive despite the challenges many rural health care providers face," says NRHA CEO Alan Morgan. "They have each made tremendous strides to advance rural health care, and we're confident they will continue to help improve the lives of rural Americans."

**Columbia Memorial Hospital** is this year's Outstanding Rural Health Organization. Located in Astoria, Ore., the hospital has transformed health care for the communities it serves on Oregon's North Coast through its innovative cancer care collaborative, emergency department, residency program, and other initiatives. It has also provided a model from which other rural hospitals may study and learn. Hospital leaders will break ground this year on a state-of-the-art replacement facility able to withstand a major earthquake and tsunami.

**Texas Panhandle Rural Nursing Education Consortium** is this year's Outstanding Rural Health Program. Comprised of five Texas Panhandle hospitals and three academic institutions, the consortium aims to address the nursing shortage and increase access to education in the northern Texas counties. Partners include Moore County Hospital District, Coon Memorial Hospital, Hereford Regional Medical Center, Ochiltree Hospital, Golden Plains Community Hospital, Amarillo College, Frank Phillips College, and West Texas A&M University.

**Keith Mueller, PhD**, has been awarded the Louis Gorin Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Health Care. Throughout his 40-year career, he has advanced rural health through expert nonpartisan policy analysis, national presentations and testimony, and the education of future health care researchers and administrators. He currently serves as Gerhard Hartman Professor in Health Management and Policy in the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa and as director of the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis.

**Leo Blandford** is NRHA's Rural Health Practitioner of the Year. As director of health equity and community impact at Outer Cape Health Services in Wellfleet, Mass., Blandford has grown

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the federally qualified health center's community health worker program to include 10 navigators who help address social drivers of health deficits and disparities in the rural Outer Cape population. Under Blandford's guidance, the Community Navigator program has become a model of innovation for community health worker services.

**John Gale** is NRHA's Outstanding Researcher Award winner. Currently serving as senior research associate at the Maine Rural Health Research Center at the University of Southern Maine, Gale is one the longest-serving members of FORHP's National Flex Monitoring and Frontier Community Health Integration Project Demonstration teams. He is recognized as an international leader in rural mental health, and his contributions to rural health research and evaluation have shaped the national rural health landscape.

**Rita Osborn** is NRHA's Outstanding Educator Award winner. In her role as executive director of the Rural Health Association of Utah and founder of the Utah Health Scholars Program at Southern Utah University, Osborn is passionate about assisting and advising students who aspire to health careers, particularly first-generation college students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds. The scholars program helps prepare undergraduate students for admission to graduate programs through rotations of academic and non-academic experiences.

**Lisa Ann Rantz** is NRHA's Volunteer of the Year. Through her role as president of the Hawaii State Rural Health Association, Rantz has gone above and beyond to provide best practices and resources to other state rural health associations by meeting one-on-one with SRHA leaders to help with their development or sustainability efforts. She is always ready to assist NRHA with SRHA-related questions. She serves as NRHA's State Association Council chair and was a 2023 NRHA Rural Health Fellow.

**Mary-Katherine McNatt**, DrPH, MPH, is the recipient of this year's President's Award. Selected for the award by NRHA President Kevin Bennett, McNatt is department chair and professor of the Public Health Department at A.T. Still University College of Graduate Health Studies. She brings extensive experience in epidemiology, program planning, community health, and public health preparedness to her roles as a member of NRHA's Government Advisory Council, Health Equity Board, and Public Health Consortium.

### **About NRHA**

NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research. NRHA's membership consists of diverse individuals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health.