



The State Office of Rural Health

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Colorado Rural Health Center Launches Workforce Support Initiative aimed at Community Health Workers

The statewide organization was recently awarded a Workforce Grant to Aide in the Recruitment and Retention of Community Health Workers in Rural Environments

Denver, CO - May 12, 2022- The Colorado Rural Health Center (CRHC) has launched a comprehensive initiative to support and improve recruitment and retention of essential healthcare workers throughout the state. Community Health Workers (CHWs) and other necessary providers, public health professionals, and additional healthcare professionals in rural communities will benefit from the direct actions taken by CRHC and funded through a grant from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) via the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

“Workforce issues have always been at the center of CRHC’s focus as a mission-driven organization,” said CRHC CEO Michelle Mills. “This new funding allows CRHC to double down on its commitment to a robust healthcare workforce at a time when workforce shortages are a growing problem.”

Funding for the program is provided through a CDPHE grant via the CDC, entitled *The National Initiative to Reduce Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities*.

Evidence-based models have shown that healthcare professionals with backgrounds and experience in rural communities are more likely to remain in these environments providing care to marginalized communities. The project will set out to increase and strengthen health and healthcare workforce capacity in Colorado communities through a series of activities that span from starting educational resources for providers to combatting provider burnout to developing a network that will promote sustainability of the rural workforce.

CRHC will first curate a resource catalog for rural providers specifically, designed to aid in recruitment of students, recent graduates, and healthcare professionals. A workforce-based environmental scan from various rural regions of the state will also be conducted to showcase realistic benefits and challenges of rural healthcare practice as well as strategies for retention. The responses collected from the environmental scan will serve as part of the blueprint for CRHCs development of a retention strategy for healthcare employers to support the sustainability of a stable rural workforce. The strategy will highlight examples of successful retention policies in addition to recommendations and suggestions that providers can pull from.

A training and educational series that at minimum will address healthcare professional burnout, wellness, and mental health will be developed and distributed to CHWs in rural areas at no cost to them. This series encourages in-person or virtual attendance, allowing for state-wide access.

In addition, a network of CHWs, public health workers, and healthcare professionals will set in motion an outlet to address social determinants of health among rural Coloradans which includes marginalized populations. The series will have a focus on (but not limited to) housing, transportation, and access to healthy food. This series will be held on a bi-monthly basis. This Rural Healthcare Network will ultimately serve as a support group for CHWs, integrate best practices into their line of work and advocate for additional resources and funding to sustain the CHW workforce.

CRHC expects to increase resources to recruit and retain rural healthcare and public health professionals in Colorado, support respective workforces, and support marginalized communities in rural areas through this grant.

About The Colorado Rural Health Center

The Colorado Rural Health Center was established in 1991 as Colorado's State Office of Rural Health. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, CRHC serves dual roles as the State Office of Rural Health and the State Rural Health Association. The organization's mission is to enhance healthcare services in the state by providing information, education, linkages, tools, and energy toward addressing rural health issues. CRHC's vision is to improve healthcare services available in rural communities to ensure that all rural Coloradans have access to comprehensive, affordable, high quality healthcare. For more information visit www.coruralhealth.org, call 303-832-7493, or call toll free 800-851-6782 from rural Colorado.