March 19, 2021

Rural Health Information during COVID-19

Dear Rural Stakeholders,

To continue to have consistent and efficient communication to provide rural health stakeholders with the information needed during this global pandemic, here are updates from the rural health programs at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

As mentioned previously, for critical information relating to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we recommend that you regularly monitor information on the [Iowa Department of Public Health COVID-19 Page](). In addition, discover the latest resources, maps and information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) on [coronavirus.iowa.gov]().

For additional resources and updates, see the following pages. Please reach out for technical assistance and for any questions you may have.

We are an ongoing resource for you.

Best,

Rural Health Programs

Iowa Department of Public Health

For questions, contact:

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Resources:

Rural Long-Term Care Facilities: This recently reviewed topic guide includes general updates throughout, as well as a new FAQ discussing COVID-19's impact on long-term care facilities. To read more, see [Rural Long-Term Care Facilities](#).

"All Hands On Deck": The COVID-19 Pandemic Through Nurses' Eyes: Podcast recording featuring Mary Wakefield describes the role of nurses and the challenges they have faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Discusses shortages of personal protective equipment, workforce challenges, vaccine administration, and solutions to support nurses in the future. Highlights the experiences of nurses at rural hospitals and clinics. To read more, see ["All Hands On Deck": The COVID-19 Pandemic Through Nurses' Eyes](#).

Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Current Evidence and Policy Approaches: Reviews existing evidence on health disparities related to COVID-19 by race and ethnicity. Presents statistics on infection rates, hospitalization and death rates, and vaccination rates. Discusses the drivers of these disparities, and offers policy recommendations to achieve health equity and reduce racial and ethnic disparities during the COVID-19 response. To read more, see [Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Current Evidence and Policy Approaches](#).

Innovations and Workforce Challenges for CAHs during COVID-19: Presents results from a survey of Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) on hospital operation and workforce adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discusses innovative practices adopted by CAHs related to hospital processes and clinical care. Describes how CAHs overcame workforce challenges during COVID-19. To read more, see [Innovations and Workforce Challenges for CAHs during COVID-19](#).

2021 Legislative and Policy Agenda for Indian Health: Provides policy recommendations from the National Indian Health Board regarding tribal health issues. Addresses COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, telehealth capacity, Indian Health Service funding, tribal public health, behavioral health, Medicare and Medicaid access, and more. To read more, see [2021 Legislative and Policy Agenda for Indian Health](#).

CMS Office of Minority Health COVID-19 Vaccine Resources: Vaccination resources for healthcare providers and community partners working with racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, sexual and gender minorities, and rural populations. Provides resources to share with consumers and patients, including information in different languages. To read more, see [CMS Office of Minority Health COVID-19 Vaccine Resources](#).

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COVID-19 and Rural Communities: Protecting Rural Lives and Health: Report examining the impact of COVID-19 in rural America, presenting data on case rates and mortality, prevalence in diverse rural communities, and health conditions contributing to severe cases of COVID-19. Discusses issues of socioeconomic vulnerability, healthcare access, and public health compliance. Offers actions to address disparities, including increasing access, supporting livelihoods, and considering social determinants of health in healthcare planning. To read more, see COVID-19 and Rural Communities: Protecting Rural Lives and Health.

An Examination of Telehealth Policy Impacts on Initial Rural Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Patterns During the COVID‑19 Pandemic: Explores changes in the patterns of medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) in western North Carolina during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examines the impact of telehealth policy changes during the pandemic on the patient population seen for MOUD, access to MOUD services for rural patients, overall MOUD clinic volume, and changes to the provision of MOUD. To read more, see An Examination of Telehealth Policy Impacts on Initial Rural Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Patterns During the COVID‑19 Pandemic.

Grantee Directory: Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Program, 2020: Provides contact information and brief project descriptions for the 57 tribal grantees funded under the Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Grant Program in the 2020-2022 funding cycle. Activities supported by this funding include COVID-19 testing, telehealth implementation, personal protective equipment and supplies, and hiring and training healthcare providers. To read more, see Grantee Directory: Rural Tribal COVID-19 Response Program, 2020.

MedPAC Report to the Congress: Medicare Payment Policy, 2021: Annual review of Medicare payment policies, with recommendations to Congress. Includes discussion on Medicare payment policies directly affecting rural providers and beneficiaries. Addresses payment adequacy for healthcare facilities and services, improving Medicare payment for post-acute care, Medicare Advantage, Medicare Part D, and the impact of healthcare provider consolidation. Contains information on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Medicare beneficiary healthcare access, mortality, and service use. Presents an option for Medicare's coverage of telehealth beyond the public health emergency. To read more, see MedPAC Report to the Congress: Medicare Payment Policy, 2021.

State Responses to Address Workforce Needs in the Initial Wave of the Pandemic: Summarizes early findings from a study examining approaches to ensuring adequate workforce capacity and strategies to expand access to needed healthcare services. Uses information from 32 interviews conducted during the first 6 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, with stakeholders from 23 states. Includes sections on regulatory flexibility, scope of practice, licensing of out-of-state providers, acute and ambulatory care services, effects on health professions

education, and use of telehealth services. To read more, see [State Responses to Address Workforce Needs in the Initial Wave of the Pandemic](#).

In the News:

Mar 15, 2021 -- [The Check Up: Pat Schou of the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network](#): Video interview with Patricia Schou, executive director of the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network and immediate past president of the National Rural Health Association. Discusses the long-term needs facing rural providers, as well as challenges they're experiencing on the COVID-19 vaccination front.

Mar 11, 2021 -- [Health Care Workers Facing a Mental Health Crisis:](#) Reports on the struggles healthcare workers are facing after a year of battling the COVID-19 pandemic. Features a critical care doctor in rural Northeast Georgia, who says her workload is still more than double what it was pre-pandemic. Discusses how the pandemic has led many healthcare workers to consider quitting.

Mar 10, 2021 -- [Is the Digital Divide the Newest Social Determinant of Health?](#) Categorizes the digital divide as a new social determinant of health, as it can lead to disparities in healthcare access and telehealth adoption. Describes how during the COVID-19 pandemic, Black, Hispanic, older, and rural patients had more difficulty accessing telehealth due to poor broadband infrastructure. Discusses efforts to address digital health literacy and the digital divide.