



## Rural Pennsylvanians Deserve Better

Health care access in rural Pennsylvania is worsening with each reported hospital closure. What is the primary care gap for rural PA? 1,600 clinicians. We need to plan together and across sectors to meet the increasingly complex health care needs for rural Pennsylvanians who are aging and becoming more diverse.

*“Out in rural areas, you have to be more versatile; you have to be a little bit brave; you have to be willing to learn; you have to get to know your patient.”*

*—Dr. Amanda Vaglia,  
Family Physician  
Indiana County, PA*

Some challenging statistics:

- Rural PA ranks 27<sup>th</sup> in the country for rural health care access and outcomes in 2019.<sup>1</sup>
- The majority of the 143 primary care shortage areas in PA are rural.
- Only 2% of PA medical school graduates go into rural practice in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup>
- 4x as many rural students need to start applying to medical school. Though 16% of PA’s students are rural,<sup>3</sup> only 4% of medical school students are rural.<sup>4</sup>



Supporting underserved Pennsylvanians through health care workforce development.

1. Recruitment
2. Training
3. Retention

## Growing Our Own

We believe that we need to grow our own rural primary care physicians because:

- Rural students are far more likely to practice rurally. About 2/3 of rural medical students will return to their roots.<sup>5</sup>
- Medical students will consider rural practice if they have enough exposure to the realities and joys of rural medicine.

### References

<sup>1</sup>[http://ruralhealthquarterly.com/home/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2019-RHQ-Report-Card\\_3.2.pdf](http://ruralhealthquarterly.com/home/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2019-RHQ-Report-Card_3.2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2021-12-13%20\(2020%20HR625\)%20Fin%20PC%20Physician%20Shortage.pdf](http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2021-12-13%20(2020%20HR625)%20Fin%20PC%20Physician%20Shortage.pdf) p.87

<sup>3</sup><https://ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-02/32-7.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00924>

<sup>5</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31365411/>

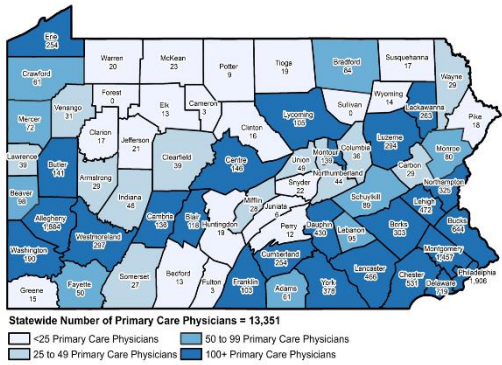
*“The person who comes and paints my house may be somebody I cared for at the hospital years before, or if I see a patient at the store, they may ask me a medical question.”*

*Dr. John Boll  
Family Physician  
Potter County, PA*



**Number of Primary Care Providers (PCP), 2019**

Data source: HRSA



## Rural Pennsylvania Needs...

### More Rural Students

Students from rural backgrounds are consistently the most likely students to choose to practice primary care in rural settings. This has been shown to be true across the globe. However, rural students are not applying to medical school at nearly the rate of their urban and suburban peers. We need **four** times as many rural students to start applying to medical school.

Rural students often need additional academic support to succeed in this process. PA AHEC is working with partners to develop a Primary Care Ambassadors Program. Medical schools can also be incentivized to accept students from rural PA.

### More Rural Clinical Experiences

In medical school, extensive experiences in rural communities can significantly influence students to choose to practice rural primary care. In short, the more exposure students have to rural life and medicine the greater the likelihood of recruiting students into rural PA. However, the lack of student housing remains a major barrier. Funding is needed for student housing and to incentivize preceptors.

### More Scholarships for Rural Students

Anticipating significant educational debt, many rural students are opting out of becoming a physician. Scholarships can be developed to encourage rural students to pursue their dreams of becoming a rural family physician. Service scholarships that require the individual to return to rural PA to provide clinical services hold potential.

### More Rural Primary Care Residencies

Rural family medicine residencies are an excellent way to attract and retain talented physicians in the community. One study indicated that rural residencies produce 3x the number of rural primary care physicians compared with non-rural residencies.<sup>6</sup> Support is needed for new and emerging rural residency programs.

#### References

<sup>6</sup><https://meridian.allenpress.com/jgme/article/14/4/441/484914/Family-Medicine-Residencies-How-Rural-Training>

## Urban and Rural Disparities

*Rural Pennsylvania needs 1,600 primary care clinicians today to be on par with Urban Pennsylvania.*

*The need for rural family physicians is only going to rise with the aging of rural Pennsylvania.*



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