

HAPPY NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH DAY!

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE,
ZORA RADOSEVICH



Happy National Rural Health Day! On this day, Thursday, Nov 16, we celebrate the healthcare providers, communities, organizations and individuals who work so hard every day to make quality, accessible health care available in rural Minnesotans.

As Director of the [Office of Rural Health and Primary Care](#) in the [Minnesota Department of Health](#), I work with a great team who are all dedicated to making a difference for the people of Minnesota. Our core purpose is clear—we work every day to help ensure that all communities and Minnesotans thrive. To do this, we develop, support and implement policies and strategies designed to optimize access to health for all rural and underserved populations.

Of course, we don't do this alone. Today we express our appreciation for everyone who contributes to building the vibrant, vital rural communities that Minnesota needs to move confidently into the future.

Minnesota's rural communities *are* facing challenges. And with challenges come opportunities to try new things and to expand on what works. Across our office, we're working in partnership with rural hospitals, clinics, educational institutions, and many others to address these challenges in meaningful ways. Given the severe workforce shortages that rural healthcare has been facing—and that the COVID pandemic exacerbated—we are committing a lot of effort to revitalizing the health care workforce and building a pipeline to rural practice.

Some of the initiatives we've undertaken in building this pipeline include:

- Providing support for creating rural residency tracks and greater opportunities for rural rotations during training for most health professions. We know that providers tend to practice close to where they did their training, so we are working hard to make sure rural training is a key component of health care education.
- Providing support for international medical graduates so they can make use of their medical education and skills in their new home, and optimizing the use of the Conrad 30 waiver program to support primary care and rural practitioners whenever possible.
- Administering an expanded loan forgiveness program for providers who commit to serving in rural and underserved communities.
- Working with our Rural Health Advisory Committee to promote best practices from around the state that introduce high school—and even younger—students to health care careers, via in-school training programs, early mentoring, and better connecting the basic sciences to their use in health care careers.

Our strong focus on building the healthcare workforce to serve rural and underserved Minnesotans recognizes the interconnectedness of the workforce to all aspects of rural healthcare. We are working with our partners to improve quality across the systems, build sustainable financing systems, encourage the integration of mental health and oral health into routine primary care, and supporting broadband across the state until every last link has been made. We are committed to ensuring rural health equity through the support of safety-net and workforce development programs.

Our role is to help identify and call attention to the need, help develop policies and administer programs to address these needs. Our partnership with you helps make this happen. Happy National Rural Health Day!

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