



# REBUILD RURAL

#RebuildRural



## HEALTHCARE

With many rural communities facing a health care crisis, it's time for policymakers to provide flexibility and the creation of new health care delivery models.

As proven during the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth can transform rural health care by decreasing transportation burdens for patients, increasing convenience for consultations with urban providers, avoiding lost wages for travel to distant facilities and lowering health care costs by facilitating easier patient care and education. And the flexibilities telehealth enjoyed during the pandemic should be extended to support rural providers. It's time to Rebuild Rural.

Rural communities face more significant health care challenges. Their populations are older, poorer and sicker on average than their urban counterparts. More than likely, they suffer from chronic diseases that require frequent monitoring and follow-up care.

Financially, rural health care faces multiple hurdles. Lower employment rates, fewer existing jobs and depopulation adversely impact the financial viability of health facilities and clinics. Public/private partnerships dedicated to expanding health care technology infrastructure and trainings on new technology offer hope for creative solutions to renovate and expand existing facilities.

While the pandemic raised awareness of the rural health care crisis, its lasting impacts offer cause for greater concern. Before the pandemic, 136 rural hospitals had closed since 2010 with nearly 700 more

vulnerable to closure.

The potential economic fallout from the closure of the vulnerable facilities would devastate rural America. It could increase rural unemployment by 1.6 percent and decrease per capita yearly income by \$703. Rural America also could lose more than \$277 billion in GDP over ten years, along with 99,000 direct health care jobs and 137,000 community jobs.

We must strengthen and rebuild our critical health care infrastructure in rural America. Rural hospitals can provide both the physical and fiscal remedies that rural communities desperately need, especially in the wake of the pandemic. With an average payroll of \$6.8 million and employment of 141 employees, rural hospitals often are the first- or second-largest employer in their area.

And hospitals are only as strong as their staffs. We must prioritize support for the next generation of rural physicians, continue funding for rural health workforce programs and expand utilization of telehealth services in rural America. Rural health care networks require continued federal flexibilities and telecom networks to support innovative telehealth strategies that can expand services to all residents through quality care at the local, integrated level while lowering costs and improving the patient experience.

Sound broadband infrastructure that supports telehealth, coupled with local facilities that can provide critically needed care, will lower health care costs, improve patient outcomes and create a stronger rural America.

REBUILD RURAL COALITION

50 F Street, NW, Suite 900 · Washington, DC 20001 · 202.626.8710