

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)



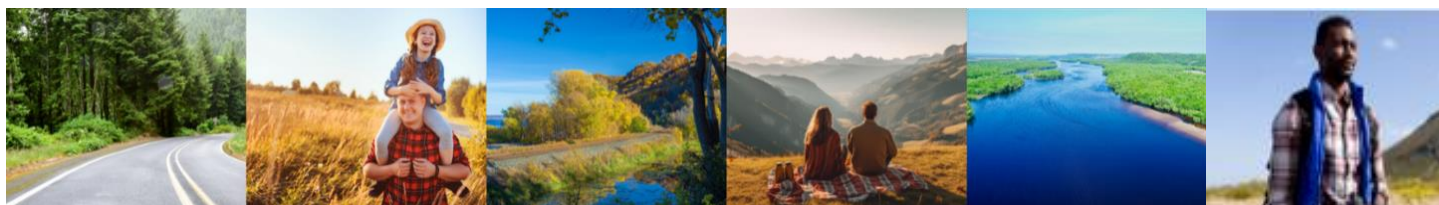
Rural Public Health Strategic Plan

FY 2024 – 2029



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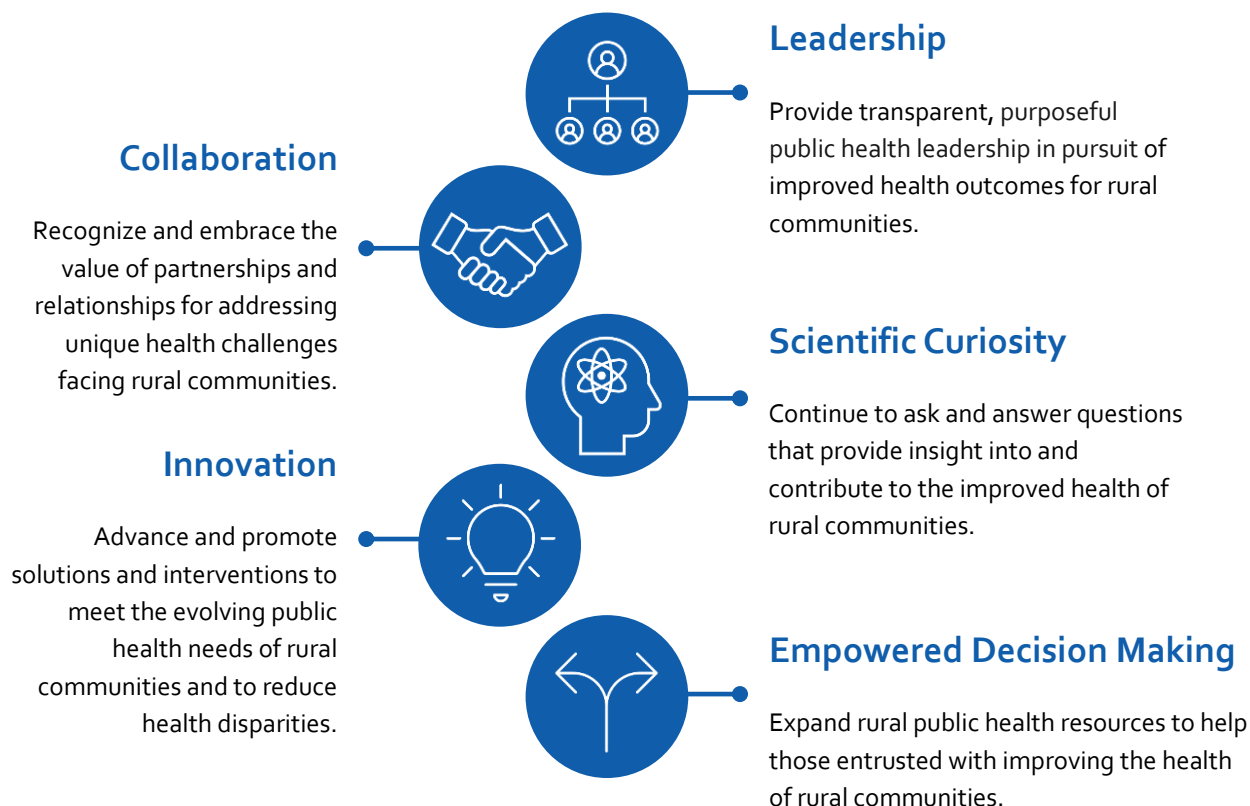
Executive Summary

In 2023, CDC established the Office of Rural Health (ORH) to advance rural public health and lead the development of CDC’s Rural Public Health Strategic Plan. The office is in CDC’s National Center for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Infrastructure and Workforce (“Public Health Infrastructure Center”). This document summarizes the agency’s rural public health strategy and includes background on its rural public health efforts, the structure and role of ORH, the approach taken to develop the rural strategic plan, and the elements of the strategic plan. The rural strategic plan defines actionable steps CDC can take to collaborate across the agency and with external and federal partners to improve and advance rural public health.

Purpose

To improve the health of rural communities by advancing the best rural public health science and practices through a coordinated, transparent, and strategic approach

Values



Introduction

Background

Tens of millions of people live in rural communities comprised of vast and varied landscapes inclusive of geographically isolated, frontier, and tribal lands, as well as U.S. territories and islands. Although the needs of rural communities vary, many face the same health challenges, such as high rates of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, and cancer — all of which can lead to poor health outcomes and even premature death.

Rural public health is **the science and practice of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health and well-being** in rural communities. Rural public health seeks to protect the health of communities and works with rural healthcare systems to improve the overall quality of life for every individual.

Many rural communities are applying innovative approaches to address their own health needs. To build on these approaches and provide continued leadership in rural public health, CDC is strengthening its programs serving rural communities, expanding partnerships with communities and rural-serving organizations, and strengthening the rural public health workforce.

1 in 5 Americans live in rural areas^{1,2}

In rural America, residents are at greater risk of death from³:

- Heart Disease
- Cancer
- Unintentional Injury
- Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease
- Stroke



CDC science contributes to the **evidence base** of what works to prevent disease in rural communities.



CDC develops and promotes **public health best practices and interventions** for rural communities.

¹<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-america.html>

²Defining "rural": There are multiple definitions among US federal agencies. Most definitions include aspects of population (e.g., density) and geography (commuting distances; proximity to urban areas) and vary due to the needs of the user. CDC does not use a single definition of "rural" for that reason. For this strategic plan and when viewed in a broad sense, "rural" includes areas outside of metropolitan (urban) areas, which may mean small towns, tribal lands, frontier, or that are remote or geographically isolated. More information about the complexities involved with defining "rural" can be found [here](#).

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/rural-health/php/public-health-strategy/public-health-considerations-for-leading-causes-of-death-in-rural-america.html>

Rural Public Health at CDC

CDC partners with numerous rural-serving organizations, including state and local health departments and federal agencies to implement various programs and activities that address rural public health needs and promote health and wellness in rural communities across the nation. Some notable programs and activities include:



Rural Emergency Preparedness and Response Toolkit

- CDC and its partners developed this [toolkit](#) of evidence-based and promising models and resources to support rural and tribal communities, healthcare facilities, state and local health departments, state offices of rural health, and other organizations serving rural populations to support emergency planning, response, and recovery.



Rural Health Studies and Publications

- Beginning in 2017, CDC published a number of rural-focused studies in its [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\)](#), and continues to include rurality in many of its reports to help understand and address the unique needs of rural communities.
- CDC funds various research centers to address local or regional health concerns. Of the 26 [Prevention Research Centers \(PRC\)](#), 10 conduct rural-focused research.
- CDC is committed to assessing how to systematically address challenges to conducting rural research, including the addition of rural-focused elements within Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) announcements.



High Obesity Program (HOP)

- CDC's [HOP](#) is a 5-year cooperative agreement to fund 16 land-grant universities to work with community extension services to improve access to healthier foods and safe places for physical activity where 40% or more of adults have obesity. From 2018 to 2023, HOP reached over 338,000 people through improved access to safe places for physical activity, and over 116,000 people through improved nutrition standards.



Public Health Associate Program (PHAP)

- PHAP is a competitive, [two-year training program](#) within CDC, where Associates are assigned to state, tribal, local, and territorial public health agencies, and nongovernmental organizations, including in rural communities.
- To bolster interest among rural-serving health organizations in acting as a host site, CDC hosts [informational webinars](#) in partnership with Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Rural Health Information Hub.



Cancer Prevention and Control Programs for State, Territorial, and Tribal Organizations

- CDC partners with hospital systems, federally qualified health centers, state and community-level coalitions, national partners, and others [through various programs](#) to eliminate preventable cancers, ensure all people get the right screening at the right time, and support cancer survivors to allow them to live longer, healthier lives. For example, through this partnership the Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) telementoring platform is used to train and support patient navigators to enhance care for cancer survivors in rural communities in Kansas, Montana, Nevada, and South Carolina.



One Health

- Since 2011, CDC has worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) to promote a [One Health](#) collaboration between federal and state public health and animal health authorities and state youth agriculture groups. The [Influenza and Zoonoses Education among Youth in Agriculture program](#) educates youth about zoonotic diseases, delivers disease prevention messages, and strengthens One Health networks among state human and animal health departments and agricultural communities across rural America.



Public Health Accreditation Board

- CDC partners with local health departments (LHDs), many classified as rural or rural population serving, to improve their performance, meet national [Public Health Accreditation Board](#) standards, and lead community health improvement efforts. Technical assistance and tools that have been customized for use in rural areas are available to LHD staff and community organizations in areas such as accreditation preparation, community health assessment and improvement planning, workforce development, and quality improvement.



CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS)


- [EIS](#) is a long-standing, globally-recognized fellowship program, renowned for its investigative and emergency response efforts. When disease outbreaks or other public health threats emerge, EIS officers investigate, identify the cause, rapidly implement control measures, and collect evidence to recommend preventive actions.
- One EIS “disease detective” supported a multi-agency project to provide rabies vaccinations to dogs on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. This rural region does not have local animal control, was recording an increasing number of dog bites in recent years, and has a larger than average feral and free-roaming dog population.

CDC Office of Rural Health (ORH)

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) was established by Congress⁴ and resides in CDC’s Public Health Infrastructure Center. ORH leverages the Center’s cross-cutting jurisdictional, workforce, and partnership support programs, and collaborates with the Office of Tribal Affairs and Strategic Alliances (OTASA) and the Office of Island Affairs (OIA) on strategies to improve the health of tribal and island populations in rural communities.

ORH collaborates with external partners to ensure that rural public health needs and strategies are integrated into CDC public health programs.

ORH’s work is concentrated in three major areas:




ORH ROLE

Lead the CDC rural public health strategy and coordinate across agency programs and with partners to improve the health and well being of rural communities throughout the U.S.

ORH VISION

A more robust and capable public health system that offers improved opportunity for better health in rural America.



Strategy

Develop and lead the execution of the agency’s rural strategic plan and establish federal leadership in rural public health.



Program Integration

Ensure rural public health thinking and strategy are integrated into major programs across CDC.



Science and Innovation

Build the evidence base and pursue science and innovation to understand and address rural public health challenges.

⁴ “...provides \$5,000,000 to establish an Office of Rural Health (ORH). The ORH will enhance the implementation of CDC’s rural health portfolio, coordinate efforts across CDC programs, and develop a strategic plan for rural health at CDC that maps the way forward both administratively and programmatically. The agreement encourages ORH to accelerate innovation, make scientific and communication resources tailored to current rural public health needs, build and improve public health functions and service delivery and provide leadership in matters of public health infrastructure.” (p. 56, Joint Explanatory Statement, Division H-Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2023)

Overview of the Strategic Plan

Developing the Strategic Plan

Following the congressional mandate, ORH began developing an agency-wide rural strategic plan to address rural public health challenges and improve the health of rural communities across the nation. To develop the plan, ORH:



Reviewed over **200 CDC rural initiatives, programs, and efforts.**



Consulted over **50 subject matter experts (SMEs)** across the agency to identify opportunities.

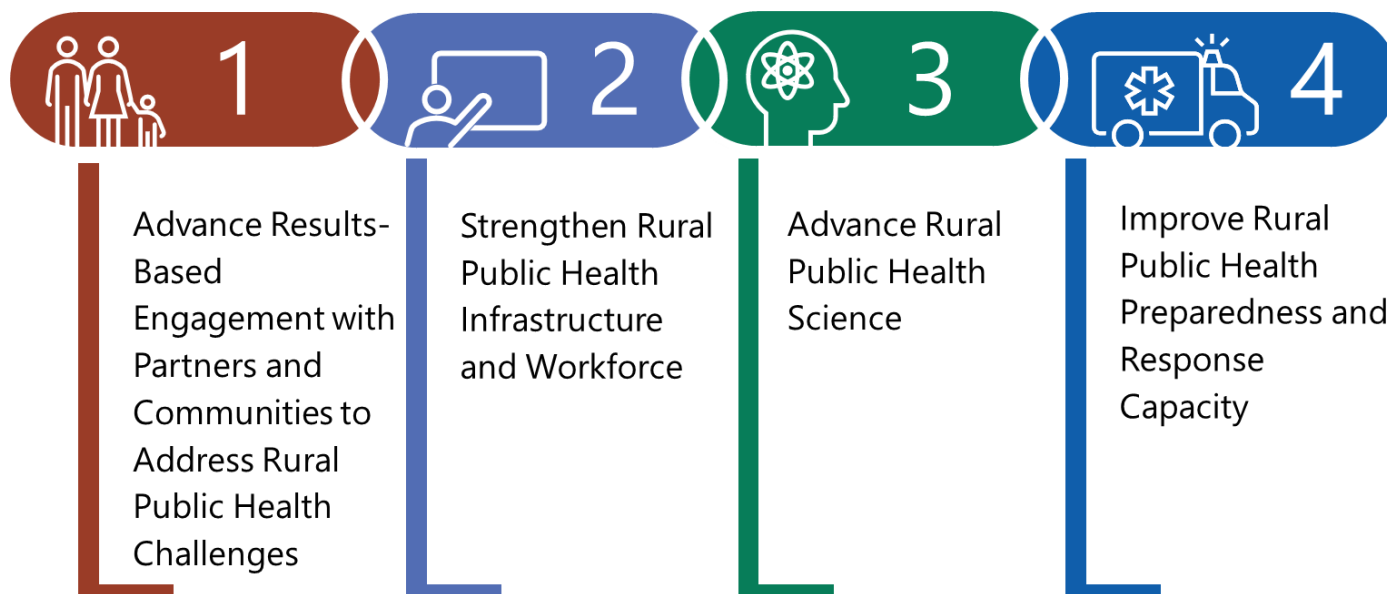


Engaged **233 federal and external partners** through 7 listening sessions, 1 agency-wide lunch and learn, and 1 public town hall.

Key Priorities, Objectives, and Outcomes

CDC's **Priorities** for rural public health provide a blueprint for the next five years. The **Objectives** define what CDC will do to advance each **Priority**, while the **Outcomes** illustrate what CDC hopes to achieve.

Key Priorities





Advance Results-Based Engagement with Partners and Communities to Address Rural Public Health Challenges

Objectives

1. Strengthen partnerships to improve rural public health functions⁵, services, and delivery.
2. Expand rural outreach and engagement among state, tribal, local, and territorial public health and rural partner organizations.
3. Develop and disseminate clear, consistent, and timely scientific, educational, and communication resources tailored to rural public health needs.
4. Provide a rural public health perspective to new and existing CDC programs.

Outcomes

- A. Enhanced trust in public health in rural communities.
- B. Better health and well-being of rural communities.
- C. Robust public health programs and activities that address rural community needs.
- D. More equitable distribution of resources.

⁵ Rural public health functions include any activity, effort, or delivery that advances rural public health.



Strengthen Rural Public Health Infrastructure and Workforce



Objectives

1. Leverage and strengthen CDC workforce recruitment strategies, plans, activities, and fellowship programs to contribute to a more diverse and skilled public health workforce in rural communities.
2. Support public health workforce development, training, and retention in rural communities.
3. Establish and sustain partnerships with state, tribal, local, and territorial public health, and rural partner organizations to improve rural public health infrastructure.
4. Provide technical guidance to CDC and other federal agencies, health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations in matters of public health infrastructure and workforce.

Outcomes

- A. Enhanced public health workforce capacity for rural communities.
- B. Strengthened rural public health infrastructure⁶.

⁶ Public Health Infrastructure is made up of the people, services, and systems needed to promote and protect health in every U.S. community. Categories include human, organizational, informational, technological, and fiscal resources.



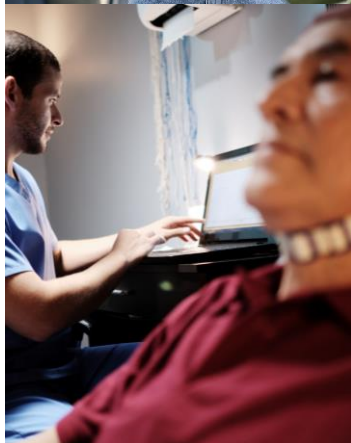
Advance Rural Public Health Science

Objectives

1. Incorporate rurality into CDC data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts.
2. Accelerate access to CDC data for health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations.
3. Strengthen the knowledge and ability to translate data into action for CDC and other federal agencies, health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations.
4. Foster rural public health research and disseminate promising practices, innovations, methods, and models.

Outcomes

- A. Increased capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate rural public health data.
- B. Informed applied research, practices, and decision making in rural communities through strengthened rural evidence base.
- C. Timely dissemination of CDC rural science and consistent access to CDC data.





Improved Rural Public Health Preparedness and Response

Objectives

1. Enhance rural community preparedness capacity⁷ to respond to public health emergencies and threats.
2. Develop rural-specific guidance and tools for preparedness and response.
3. Provide preparedness and response training and technical assistance to the public health workforce to help enable rural readiness.

Outcomes

- A. Capable rural communities better equipped to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies and threats.
- B. Prepared rural public health workforce more capable of responding to public health emergencies and threats.



⁷ Preparedness and response capacity includes emergency and preventative preparedness and response to public health emergencies and threats.

Summary of Strategic Plan

Priority	Objectives	Outcomes
Advance Results-Based Engagement with Partners and Communities to Address Rural Public Health Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen partnerships to improve rural public health functions, services, and delivery. 2. Expand rural outreach and engagement among state, tribal, local, and territorial public health and rural partner organizations. 3. Develop and disseminate clear, consistent, and timely scientific, educational, and communication resources tailored to rural public health needs. 4. Provide a rural public health perspective to new and existing CDC programs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Enhanced trust in public health in rural communities. B. Better health and well-being of rural communities. C. Robust public health programs and activities that address rural community needs. D. More equitable distribution of resources.
Strengthen Rural Public Health Infrastructure and Workforce	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage and strengthen CDC workforce recruitment strategies, plans, activities, and fellowship programs to contribute to a diverse and skilled public health workforce in rural communities. 2. Support public health workforce development, training, and retention in rural communities. 3. Establish and sustain partnerships with state, tribal, local, and territorial public health, and rural partner organizations to improve rural public health infrastructure. 4. Provide technical guidance to CDC and other federal agencies, health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations in matters of public health infrastructure and workforce. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Enhanced public health workforce capacity for rural communities. B. Strengthened rural public health infrastructure.
Advance Rural Public Health Science	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate rurality into CDC data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts. 2. Accelerate access to CDC data for health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations. 3. Strengthen the knowledge and ability to translate data into action for CDC and other federal agencies, health departments, rural communities, practitioners, and rural-serving organizations. 4. Foster rural public health research and disseminate promising practices, innovations, methods, and models. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Increased capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate rural public health data. B. Informed applied research, practices, and decision making in rural communities through strengthened rural evidence base. C. Timely dissemination of CDC rural science and consistent access to CDC data.
Improve Rural Public Health Preparedness and Response Capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance rural community preparedness capacity to respond to public health emergencies and threats. 2. Develop rural-specific guidance and tools for preparedness and response. 3. Provide preparedness and response training and technical assistance to the public health workforce to help enable rural readiness. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Capable rural communities better equipped to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies and threats. B. Prepared rural public health workforce more capable of responding to public health emergencies and threats.

CDC is committed to
advancing rural public health across America by
identifying and addressing gaps in the evidence
base, data analytic capabilities, and the workforce in
rural communities.



<http://www.cdc.gov/ruralhealth>

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