

Letter to the Secretary: February 20-22, 2008, Washington, D.C.

March 19, 2008

The Honorable Michael M. Leavitt
Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

On behalf of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, I would like to present the Committee's 2008 Report. The Committee's 2008 Report recognizes the 20th anniversary of the Committee by offering a 20-year retrospective consideration of rural health and human services. It then highlights emerging issues for rural health care delivery, human services, and community development. Key focus areas from this report include:

Health: workforce, quality improvement, health information technology, implementation of the MMA, the medical home model, and emergency preparedness;

Human services: importance of data, under-utilization, workforce burn-out, funding streams, one-stop shopping, and leadership;

Community development: barriers to collaboration, coordination with other Cabinet-level Departments, and leadership development at the local level.

The Committee's recommendations fit in two categories: coordination among services, and quantification of HHS' rural investment. The Committee believes that HHS should promote coordination among Federal health and human services programs by forming an inter-Departmental rural working group, using demonstration projects to integrate funding streams, and identifying statutory and regulatory provisions that hinder local coordination of services. In addition, the Committee supports HHS' efforts to better understand its rural investment, by recommending that all HHS programs collect rural-specific data, mandating a standardized rural performance measurement system for HHS human services programs, producing an annual report on HHS rural investments, and requiring rural impact statements on all major HHS regulatory policies.

I would also like to provide an update from our most recent meeting in Washington, DC, February 20-22, 2008. The Committee has begun work on its 2009 Report and is enthusiastic about its three topic areas: implementation of the medical home model in rural areas, using

workforce development as a tool in rural community development, and issues in providing services to rural at-risk children. During our recent meeting in Washington, DC, the Committee heard from experts on these three topic areas and began discussions on the content for each chapter.

Over this year, the Committee will gather data on the three topic areas and draft chapters for review at the June 2-4, 2008 meeting in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This meeting will provide an opportunity to examine each of the 2009 report topics in the context of a southern rural community. Thank you again for your support of this Committee and your support of rural America.

Sincerely,

The Honorable David M. Beasley
Chair