

Letter to the Secretary: September 7-9, 2003, Charleston, West Virginia

October 20, 2003

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C.
20201

Dear Secretary Thompson,

The National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services held its fall meeting in Charleston, WV September 7-9th, 2003 and I wanted to share with you some of the findings from that meeting. The Committee continued to work on its 2004 report. This report will cover a number of topics including the importance of integrating behavioral health and primary care in rural settings, access to oral health care services and how to improve services for the elderly. In gathering information for the report, the Committee heard testimony from a number of experts and also conducted a number of informative site visits in rural communities.

The meeting also afforded the Committee an opportunity to hear about some unique activities in West Virginia regarding workforce development. The West Virginia Rural Health Education Partnership (WVRHEP) is a collaborative program between the State's health profession schools, rural communities and several health care organizations. The premise behind the program is "growing your own." The Partnership works to encourage junior high and high school students to enter key health and human service professions and then provides support to them through their training and works to then place them in rural communities.

The Committee also had the opportunity to visit Minnie Hamilton Health Care Center in Grantsville, W.V., which provided an interesting example of integrated health and human service delivery in a rural community. There was a clear link between the health providers and the senior center. Clearly, this makes sense in rural communities as it provides a means to jointly to meet the entire spectrum of senior needs. This is critically important in rural communities given the scarce resources and it makes sense in terms of continuity of care.

As you know, this was the first meeting of the Committee under your expanded charge to focus on both health and human services. As part of that charge, we also had staffing assistance from the Administration on Aging (AoA) and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). This staffing support is critical given the new charge for the Committee and I want to thank the Department for providing it. The Committee will continue its work on the 2004 report over the next few months. We expect to submit that to you early in 2004.

I would also like to formally invite you to attend the February 22-24th meeting in Washington, D.C., which will be held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. I believe this would provide an opportunity to share with you our efforts to meet the broader charge you have given to the Committee to look at how the Department serves rural communities in both health and human services. At this meeting, the Committee will choose its topics for the 2005 report. The Committee would benefit greatly by hearing from you about your priorities for the coming year.

Sincerely,

The Honorable David M. Beasley