

NACRHHS

National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services

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Overland Park, KS

June 17, 2020

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Dear Secretary Azar,

On behalf of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, I am pleased to send you two policy briefs and accompanying recommendations from our most recent meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in March. The Committee's policy briefs focus on two issues: rural HIV prevention and treatment challenges and maternal health and obstetric care challenges in rural areas. Our meeting took place before the Coronavirus epidemic so the providers and speakers we heard from did not discuss it. We do want to express our concern about the epidemic's impact on rural communities, hospitals, and providers and plan to take up the issues at our next meeting.

The Committee chose to focus on rural HIV because in recent years rural communities have been experiencing notable increases in new HIV cases, largely due to the intersection with the opioid epidemic. President Trump's "Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America" initiative makes this an especially fortuitous time to focus on the rural aspects of the epidemic.

The Committee also took up the issue of maternal mortality and morbidity and access to obstetrical care in rural areas in recognition of the fact that rural American is seeing diminishing of availability of obstetrical care as hospitals close and that, even hospitals that remain open, have eliminated obstetrical units. Pregnancy related deaths are only one aspect of this problem. Severe maternal morbidity (SMM), including unexpected outcomes of labor and delivery that result in significant short-or long-term consequences to a woman's health has also been steadily increasing in recent years.

Clearly, there are opportunities for the department to address both of these important issues through its many programs and activities. In that regard, we are pleased to offer the Committee's recommendations to you in the attached Policy Briefs.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our plan for the next Committee meeting is to condense the agenda and hold it virtually. No dates have yet been confirmed, but we will inform you as soon as they are. We welcome your participation or the participation of your representative, should schedules allow.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Jeff Colyer
Chair

Enclosures: