



National Advisory Committee On Rural Health and Human Services



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August 5, 2016

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell,

On behalf of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services I am sending you two policy briefs with their accompanying recommendations. The first brief examines the ongoing opioid epidemic and its effect on families in rural America. The second examines alternative models to preserve access to emergency care for rural areas affected by hospital closures. In preparing these briefs, the Committee met in Beaufort, South Carolina and conducted site visits around the region.

The Human Services Subcommittee visited Beaufort County Social Services to learn about the impact of opioid abuse on rural communities. The members heard directly from local administrators, providers and frontline staff of substance abuse and child welfare agencies who provide support to families struggling with addiction in rural America. A key concern expressed by administrators and staff alike, is the limited availability of treatment programs in rural communities along with and inadequate recovery support services to address substance use disorders and the needs of families.

The surge of rural hospital closures in the past two years has prompted policy discussions around possible alternative models of care, their structure and financing in communities too small to support a full-service hospital but needing more services than offered by a primary care clinic. The Health Subcommittee members heard from government officials, rural health researchers, and hospital administrators to learn how rural communities can maintain access to emergency and other healthcare services. In the enclosed policy brief, the Committee examines some of the initial proposals for a new model of care and lays out principles that should be used in any discussion of policy options for alternative models of care in rural communities.

The next Committee meeting will be in Albuquerque, New Mexico, from September 14 -16, 2016, where we will take up the topic of social determinants of health in rural areas. I know this is an area of particular interest for you and, as always, we welcome your participation in our meeting or the participation of your representatives.

Sincerely,

/Ronnie Musgrove/

The Honorable Ronnie Musgrove

Chair

Enclosures:

Families in Crisis: The Human Service Implications of Rural Opioid Abuse Policy Brief July.2016

Alternative Models to Preserving Access to Emergency Care Policy Brief July.2016