



# National Advisory Committee On Rural Health and Human Services



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February 28, 2017

The Honorable Thomas E. Price, M.D.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Price:

On behalf of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services (NACRHHS), congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). We thank you for your leadership and look forward to serving you. The NACRHHS is a 21-member citizens' panel reflecting wide-ranging, first-hand experience with rural issues that provides recommendations to the Secretary of HHS. The Committee was chartered in 1987 to advise the Secretary on ways to address health care challenges in rural America. The work of the Committee expanded in 2002 to focus on both health and human service issues in rural areas.

I am sending you a policy brief examining the cross cutting issue of the social determinants of health—a range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors—that affect individual and population level health. Such factors are partially responsible for differences in health status among and between communities. Taking these factors into account in the drafting of regulations and the development of programs at HHS can play a key role in improving care delivery in rural communities.

In preparing this brief, the Committee met in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and conducted site visits around the region. The Committee broke into three subgroups for site visits and roundtable discussions in three different locations: Presbyterian Medical Services Cuba Health Clinic, the Laguna Pueblo Tribe, and Guadalupe County Hospital in Santa Rosa, New Mexico.

Activities at the Cuba Health Clinic visit related to the unique role community health centers play in the provision of access to care within New Mexico, and included the strategies of local community health workers developed to address social determinants for their patient populations. The Laguna site visit focused on how tribal governments address social determinants, with special attention to the way in which tribal dynamics can both accelerate opportunities or present barriers to achieving better health.

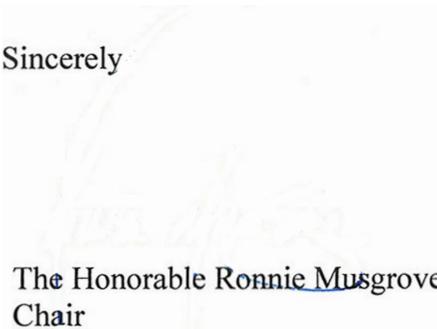
The visit to Guadalupe County Hospital focused on the ways rural hospitals can

work to improve the social determinants of health through health needs assessments, community benefit agreements, and non-traditional partnerships that improve community well-being. The recommendations contained in the policy brief are informed by these site visits.

Since 1987, the Committee has provided the Secretary with letters and Policy Briefs on the various topics integral to improving health outcomes in rural communities and populations across our nation. These products are available on the Committee website at [www.hrsa.gov/advisorycommittees/rural/](http://www.hrsa.gov/advisorycommittees/rural/).

We would like to invite you or your designee to address the Committee during our next meeting, which will be held at the Humphrey Building on April 11, 2017. We welcome a discussion of how the Committee can best meet its charge of advising the Department on rural issues.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ronnie Musgrove", is written over a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp or watermark.

The Honorable Ronnie Musgrove  
Chair

Enclosure:  
Social Determinants of Health, December 2016