

THE NORC WALSH CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH ANALYSIS

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About NORC and the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research organization headquartered in downtown Chicago with additional offices on the University of Chicago's campus, the D.C. Metro area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco. Since 1941, NORC's leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination—coupled with deep subject matter expertise—has provided the foundation for effective solutions.

NORC's health research group includes prominent health policy makers, nationally recognized health services researchers, and leading experts in survey design and implementation. The staff expertise spans a broad multidisciplinary spectrum including economics, sociology, public health, medicine and biological sciences, policy, epidemiology, social work, statistics, and political science.

Part of the NORC health group in since 2003, the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis is the home for rural health research, evaluation and program support at NORC. The Walsh Center studies policy issues affecting public health and health care in rural America, including payment systems, frontier care, access to health care services, public health systems, regional disparities, rural Veterans health, and emergency preparedness.

Sample Projects

Rural Health Reform Policy Research Center (RHR-PRC). The NORC Walsh Center, in partnership with the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health, operates one of the six HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy-funded Rural Health Research Centers. The focus of the RHR-PRC is to conduct timely research on the implications of health reform on rural providers, communities and residents.

Frontier Community Health Integration Demonstration. For the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, NORC and IMPAQ International are designing and evaluating demonstration models with Rural Hospital Flexibility grantees in four states. The goal is to increase access to and improve the adequacy of payments for acute care, extended care, and other essential health care services, as well as evaluate regulatory challenges facing providers in frontier counties.

The Impact of the Economic Downturn on Rural Health Clinics (RHCs). For the HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy, NORC is conducting a study to investigate the increasing role of RHCs as health care safety net providers during the current economic downturn. Specifically, the project assesses impact on RHC financial viability and their ability to provide primary care in rural areas. Findings will be disseminated to national,



state and local policymakers to bring attention to issues faced by RHCs that may need to be addressed to assure accessibility to essential primary care in rural communities.

Rural Health Outreach Tracking and Evaluation Program. For the HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy, the NORC Walsh Center, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the six grant programs funded under the Outreach Authority of section 330A of the Public Health Services Act. Sample evaluation projects include the identification of common evaluation metrics across grant programs, evaluation of the network development planning grant program, and the use of evidence based practices among grantees.

Access to Rural Public Health Services. For the National Rural Health Association, NORC is conducting a study to help provide a “voice” to rural communities that lack local public health services, leveraging NORC’s expertise in both public health systems and rural health research. NORC will identify jurisdictions within states that lack local public health services and conduct site visits to develop case studies of these communities’ experiences.

Modeling the Impact of Urban Evacuation on Surrounding Jurisdictions. NORC, as part of the CDC/NACCHO Advanced Practice Centers program, developed a series of tools and resources to assist rural areas in estimating numbers of evacuees likely to settle in their communities following emergencies. Funding support was also provided through the HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy to conduct a national survey of urban citizens regarding evacuation intent and likely destinations.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disparities in the Appalachian Region. For the Appalachian Regional Commission, NORC conducted a comprehensive study to assess substance abuse and mental health disparities, and access to treatment services, in the Appalachian Region. Quantitative analyses were conducted using multiple secondary data sets in order to identify findings consistent across data sets; qualitative analyses were conducted to identify key community-level protective factors. Additional analyses identified disparities specific to the Appalachian coal mining region.

Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program. For the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), NORC is leading a comprehensive evaluation of the design, implementation and outcomes of the five Tribal Health Professions Opportunities Grants. Activities include reviewing documents and curricula, conducting site visits and interviews with grantee administrative staff and partners, interviewing local employers, conducting focus groups, and analyzing program operations data as part of this evaluation.

Other Projects

Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Rural Health Departments Seeking Accreditation.

Department of Veterans’ Affairs Office of Rural Health, Policy and Planning Group.

National Profile of Tribal Public Health Agencies.

The Medicare Physician Quality Reporting Initiative: Implications for Rural Physicians.

Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Preparedness Planning.

Delivering the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) Recommendations in a Rural Health Plan.

Use of Emergency Departments and Inpatient Care for Conditions Related to Poor Oral Health in Rural Areas.

Learn more about NORC and the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis at www.norc.org

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