



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Alabama to observe National Rural Health Day November 17

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Rural Health Day 2016 will be celebrated on November 17. This annual observance was created to emphasize the importance of rural America, increase awareness of rural health-related issues, and promote efforts to address those issues. The Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health (OPCRH), is honored to join the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH), the Alabama Rural Health Association, and other stakeholders in calling attention to the important contributions of rural health on this day.

Rural health professionals, hospitals and clinics are dedicated to delivering high-quality and innovative care to underserved people. Fifty-four of Alabama's 67 counties are considered rural, and over 40 percent of the state's population live in these counties.

While rural communities are great places to live, they also face unique health care needs. Hospitals are the economic foundation of many rural communities. One challenge is that rural hospitals are threatened with declining reimbursement rates and disproportionate funding levels that make it more difficult to serve their residents.

The OPCRH programs to help communities with accessibility issues in Alabama include the following:

- Loan repayments for physicians, dentists and other health care professionals through the National Health Service Corps
- No-cost recruitment of physicians through the use of a national recruitment and retention database
- Adoption of telehealth services to bring distant health care to the local community
- Placement of foreign medical graduates through a J-1 visa waiver program

In addition, OPCRH works closely with rural hospital and safety net providers to identify problems and provide needed technical assistance and resources. More than 150 health care providers are presently working throughout the state under programs administered by the office, dispersed among the state's 125 community health centers, more than 100 rural health clinics, and other providers.

The OPCRH's recruitment program is available to any rural safety net health care organization that has need for additional primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants or dentists.

"Our greatest reward is in knowing we are making a difference in the lives of our rural and underserved constituents" notes Chuck Lail, director of the office. "We take pride in our work and in the great people we serve."

Additional information about National Rural Health Day can be found at [www.celebratepowerofrural.org](http://www.celebratepowerofrural.org). To learn more about NOSORH, visit [www.nosorh.org](http://www.nosorh.org); to learn more about the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, visit <http://adph.org/ruralhealth>. The Alabama Rural Health Association's information is available at [www.arhaonline.org](http://www.arhaonline.org).