

Fall Newsletter

2024



Rural Health Innovation Award: Excellence in Maine's Rural Health Initiatives

We're excited to announce that the Maine CDC Rural Health and Primary Care Program has received the Rural Health Innovation Award! Presented by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health and the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, this award honors our commitment to enhancing health care in rural Maine.

The award celebrates our program's impactful work in advocacy, clear communication, and educational initiatives supporting rural health care providers and residents. From workforce retention to expanding educational resources, we're dedicated to meeting the unique needs of rural communities.

We're honored by this recognition and remain committed to our mission to improve rural health outcomes. Thank you to our partners and team for making this possible!



Left: Erica Dyer, Public Health Educator II,
Rural Health and Primary Care Program

Right: Nicole Breton, Director,
Rural Health and Primary Care Program

A Note From the Editor

Welcome to our inaugural newsletter edition! I'm thrilled to share stories, updates, and accomplishments that highlight the incredible work happening in rural health across Maine. Every story, every insight, and every feature in this issue was carefully crafted to celebrate the resilience, dedication, and innovation of our rural health care community. As we continue this journey, I invite you to share your feedback, ideas, and stories to shape future editions. Let's make this a resource that truly reflects the heart of our community.

– Kyle Kagele, Office Associate II
Maine CDC Rural Health and Primary Care

Upcoming Events

[NRHA — 36th Rural Health Policy Institute](#)

February 11-13 in Washington, D.C.

[Maine Hospital Association - 2025 Small or Rural Hospital Conference](#)

February 12-14 in Newry, Maine



Celebrating 30 Years of the Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Program

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Conrad 30 J-1 Visa Program, a vital initiative addressing physician shortages in rural and underserved areas. In Maine, this program has significantly enhanced health care access, bringing skilled physicians to communities facing critical shortages. Many of these doctors have not only fulfilled their service commitments but also chosen to stay, becoming integral parts of their communities and building lasting patient relationships.

As part of our National Rural Health Day celebration, we honor J-1 physicians who have made long-term commitments to Maine, recognizing their resilience and contributions to rural health care. The program has enriched Maine's health care workforce, fostering diversity and improving health outcomes in our rural communities. Join us in celebrating these health care heroes dedicated to building a healthier future for all.

Reflecting on National Rural Health Day and Honoring Maine's Rural Health care Champions!

On November 21, 2024, the Maine State House, Hall of Flags, came alive with stories of dedication, resilience, and innovation as we celebrated National Rural Health Day. This event showcased the extraordinary people and programs committed to supporting the health and well-being of Maine's rural communities. Rural Maine represents the heart of our state, where close-knit connections and a shared commitment to well-being drive the remarkable efforts of health care providers working to meet unique challenges and ensure that quality care reaches every corner of our state.



Award Honorees This year, we proudly honor several outstanding individuals and organizations for their invaluable contributions:

Nancy Murphy: Community Star

**Bridgton and Rumford Hospitals
Central Maine Health care**

"For her leadership, dedication, and unwavering commitment to enhancing the well-being of rural communities in Maine."

Richard Willett: Rural Health Hero

Redington-Fairview General Hospital

"In recognition of his tireless efforts, compassion, and advocacy in advancing rural health care access across Maine."

Redington-Fairview General Hospital:

Rural Excellence in Health Care Award

"For providing outstanding health services, innovation, and support to rural populations, improving health outcomes in Maine."

Bonnie Vaughn: Excellence in Oral Health

Kennebec Valley Family Dentistry

"For her exceptional contributions to advancing oral health care and expanding access to underserved rural communities in Maine."

Event Highlights The day's program will include remarks from Dr. Puthiery Va, Director of Maine CDC, as well as an award ceremony recognizing outstanding health care leaders. A special segment commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Conrad 30 Waiver Program, a vital initiative that has brought dedicated health care professionals to underserved rural areas of Maine, and improving access to essential care for thousands.

As we reflect on National Rural Health Day, we are reminded of the exceptional dedication, compassion, and innovation that define rural health care in Maine. We are grateful for the commitment of our health care providers, whose work strengthens our communities, supports resilience, and ensures that even Maine's most remote areas receive essential health services.



Dental Therapists Now Eligible for Federal Loan Forgiveness!

Exciting developments are on the horizon for Maine's dental health community. After years of advocacy and persistent efforts, dental therapists have now become eligible for federal loan forgiveness programs in states where they are licensed to practice. This recognition is especially significant as it opens up new financial support options for those providing essential dental care in underserved areas.

What are Dental Therapists?

Dental therapists have played an important role in oral health care around the world for over a century. Dental therapists are licensed providers that work under the supervision of a dentist and provide routine dental care, such as exams and fillings. They can work in traditional dental offices and clinics, or in community-based settings, such as schools or nursing homes. Dental therapists are a flexible and complementary addition to the dental team.

Dental therapists play a crucial role in bridging the dental health gap, particularly in rural areas with limited access to care. This new eligibility for loan forgiveness not only serves as an incentive for individuals considering a career in dental therapy but also promotes long-term retention of skilled dental professionals in rural communities. These dedicated professionals often work with vulnerable populations, providing preventive and restorative dental services. This policy change represents a major victory in expanding health care access, reinforcing Maine's commitment to equitable and accessible dental care.

New Data Analysis Dashboard: Tool for Rural Health Insights

We're excited to share the launch of the *New England Rural Data Analysis Dashboard*! This innovative mapping tool, developed by the New England Rural Health Association (NERHA) with funding from the six New England State Offices of Rural Health, is designed to illuminate rural health disparities across the region and provide actionable insights for rural health care improvement.

This dashboard offers access to nearly 200 rural health data elements across categories such as demographics, care utilization, insurance status, maternity services, social determinants of health, and more. Users can compare rural vs. urban disparities at state, multi-state, and regional levels, as well as explore variations by small rural, large rural, small non-rural, and core metro areas. With its ability to download data and generate PDF reports, this tool is invaluable for health care professionals, advocates, researchers, and students alike.

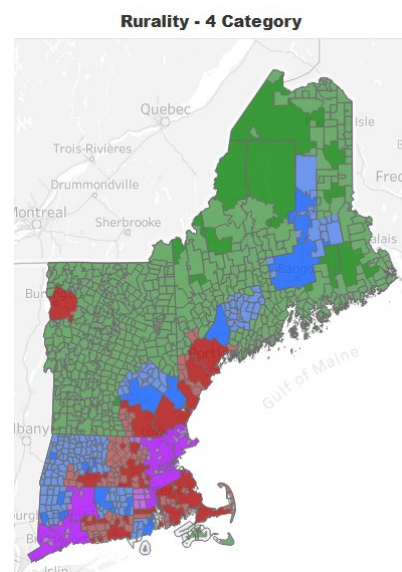
New England's rural communities are renowned for their resilience, tight-knit nature, and scenic beauty. However, these areas also face unique challenges, including significant health disparities compared to their urban counterparts. The dashboard sheds light on these differences, making it easier for decision-makers and advocates to address the needs of rural populations effectively.

From the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the rugged coastline of Maine, this resource connects

communities with data to better understand and tackle health inequities. Whether you're a rural health professional, policymaker, or student, the Rural Data Analysis Dashboard equips you with the tools needed to make

informed decisions and advocate for positive change. To explore this dynamic resource and unlock the story behind New England's rural health landscape, visit the New England Rural Health Association website at www.nerha.org.

For more details or questions, reach out to our program!



What to Expect in Future Newsletters!

We're thrilled to bring you the first edition of our quarterly newsletter—a new platform to stay connected, informed, and inspired by Maine's rural health community. Each quarter, our newsletter will feature highlights of recent events, updates on health initiatives, and heartening stories from the field. We'll also provide valuable resources, updates on funding opportunities, and share the latest in rural health care innovation.

This newsletter is more than just a means to share information; it's a celebration of the incredible work being done in rural health care across Maine. From shining a light on health care heroes to exploring innovative solutions addressing critical challenges, we aim to create a space that not only informs but also inspires. Through shared stories and experiences, we hope to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the resilience and dedication of those who serve Maine's rural communities.

As we launch this initiative, we hope this newsletter becomes more than just an update—it's a community space to celebrate the hard work and dedication seen across Maine. We want to make this publication as engaging and meaningful as possible, and we'd love your input!

To make each edition truly reflect our community, we're introducing some interactive features:

Spotlight Nominations: Do you know an outstanding colleague, health care provider, or organization making a difference in rural health? Nominate them to be featured in an upcoming issue! Let's celebrate their contributions.

Community Polls: Each quarter, we'll pose a poll question about current topics, challenges, or trends in rural health. Share your perspective, and we'll include the results in the next newsletter.

Your Stories: Have a story, event, or achievement that should be recognized? Submit your news to us, and we may include it in our next issue!

Reader Q&A: Do you have questions about funding opportunities, new policies, or innovative health practices? Send in your questions, and we'll have experts provide answers in a dedicated Q&A section.

If there's something you'd love to see in future issues, or if you have any stories, suggestions, or resources to share, we encourage you to reach out. Together, we'll make this newsletter a rich source of connection, insight, and support for Maine's rural health network.

Thank you for being part of this journey, and we look forward to hearing from you!



Comments or Questions?

Feel free to email us at kyle.kagele@maine.gov

Rural Health and Primary Care Program

286 Water Street, 5th Floor

11 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333-0011

Main Telephone: (207) 287-5524

Fax: (207) 287-5431

www.mainepublichealth.gov/ruralhealth