



Chairman Tom Cole

*Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

Hearing: Investing in our Health Workforce and Rural Communities

April 12, 2018

Opening Statement As Prepared

Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome our witnesses today to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies to discuss investments in our health workforce programs and initiatives targeting rural communities. We look forward to their testimonies.

Ninety-seven percent of the nation's land area is classified as rural, but this area houses less than twenty percent of the nation's population. Americans living in rural areas are at a greater risk of dying from heart disease, cancer, and stroke than their urban counterparts. Age-adjusted death rates from unintentional injuries are fifty percent higher for rural than urban populations. Rural areas often have less access to a range of health care providers and services when compared to their urban counterparts. Acknowledging this disparity, the Subcommittee has supported increases for several rural health programs. Ensuring small rural hospitals can keep their doors open, and where possible, supporting residency programs is critical to improving the health of rural communities. Rural areas struggle to attract and retain providers, compounding the effects felt from the nation's primary health care workforce shortage.

By some estimates, the United States could face a shortage of almost one hundred thousand physicians by 2025. Not only do we face a shortage in the total number of providers, but we struggle to recruit and train physicians from our local communities. Currently one in four practicing physicians comes from outside the United States. These figures signal a missed opportunity to attract young individuals to a growing sector of the economy. Moreover, the shortage of health professionals is felt most acutely in geographic areas with the greatest need such as rural communities and Tribal populations. Increasing opportunities for people to become health care professionals is a vital component to addressing the current high demand for jobs in the health sector.

Today, we look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what the Health Resources and Services Administration is doing to address the shortage of providers in rural areas, help rural counties hardest hit by the opioid epidemic recover, and support rural hospitals from closure. We also look forward to hearing about the workforce investments across the training continuum and how those programs place practitioners in the communities most in need. We hope to learn more about how we can target our federal investments to maximize the impact on rural populations and improve access to care for those in other underserved areas. Today I'm pleased to welcome the following witnesses--

- Tom Morris is the Associate Administrator for Rural Health Policy at HRSA. Mr. Morris coordinates analysis and response to policy issues affecting rural America, particularly the impact of Medicare and Medicaid regulations on the rural health workforce and service delivery. He oversees nearly forty grant programs that focus on building rural health care capacity at the state and community level.
- Dr. Luis Padilla serves as the Associate Administrator for Health Workforce and Director of the National Health Service Corps for HRSA. With total budgetary resources of over one billion dollars supporting more than 40 programs, the bureau of health workforce seeks to improve access to quality health care through a well-trained and well-distributed 21st century workforce. Dr. Padilla coordinates programs that support the health care workforce, including support for the more than ten thousand National Health Service Corps clinicians providing care nationwide.

As a reminder to the subcommittee members and our witnesses, we will abide by the five-minute rule; witnesses have five minutes to present their testimony and members have five minutes to ask questions. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

I would now like to yield to my Ranking Member, the Gentlelady from Connecticut for her opening remarks.

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