



National Advisory Committee On Rural Health and Human Services



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April 24, 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 (Committee), I would like to thank you for taking the time to speak with the Committee during its meeting at the Hubert Humphrey Building on April 11th. I regret that urgent family matters prevented me from being present during your visit, but understand that the Committee members who were present greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet you and ask some questions. Your visit reinvigorated them in their mission to serve you and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) by identifying and providing context for the complex and urgent health and human service issues faced by rural communities.

Typically the Committee travels to a rural community to hear directly from rural stakeholders but decided to hold this meeting in Washington D.C. and use it to inform a strategic plan that would identify future topics to study that are relevant to HHS. The Committee benefitted from hearing directly from a broad range of HHS staff and from the leadership of membership organizations serving rural communities. That information helped the Committee identify future topics for its work.

The result of the meeting was consensus and enthusiasm to work along with you in a number of areas. First, there was clear consensus that the Committee will prioritize topics that fall within the clinical areas that you mentioned as departmental priorities: childhood obesity, mental illness, and the opioid crisis. As you acknowledged during your visit, all three areas pose extreme challenges to rural communities and, in addition, all three areas align closely with the expertise and interests of our Committee members. The Committee looks forward to serving you through policy recommendations in these clinical areas and welcomes your input regarding discrete policy topics within these areas on which the Committee can offer rural-specific insights.

Second, because several of our Committee members serve, or previously served, as rural health and human service providers themselves, the group is enthusiastic to weigh-in on your request for information about areas of regulatory burden that have disparate effects on rural providers.

As you noted, eliminating or amending rules and regulations that providers feel are hindering rather than helping their efforts to provide high-quality services will improve health and human service delivery in the face of limited resources. Over the next several months, Committee members plan to leverage their professional roles and networks to develop a list of rules and regulations that seem to be particularly onerous for rural providers. Once final, this list will be submitted to your office.

Finally, the Committee understands the fiscal constraints facing HHS and the country, along with the need to find new ways to be creative and learn to do more with less. While the Committee continues to be concerned about potential budget reductions, we acknowledge that rural communities are home to some of the most creative and effective institutions when it comes to making the most of scarce resources. Rural communities excel at this by necessity. From our perspective, one way to help improve efficiency and understanding of the unique challenges faced by rural America would be to establish a department-wide rural agenda for health and human services. The Committee believes that such an agenda would allow for the stronger integration of programs and increased data flow across agencies in ways that would allow people, patients, and partnerships to deliver more effective outcomes in rural areas. The Committee would be pleased to advise such an effort in any way that is most helpful.

Thank you again for meeting with the Committee. While the Committee's approach to its work may have evolved over the years, its commitment to its charge to serve the Secretary by providing input on ways to address health and human services problems in rural areas has remained central to its work. We welcome you to your new position and look forward to serving you over the coming years.

Sincerely,

/Ronnie Musgrove/

The Honorable Ronnie Musgrove
Chair