The Prevention and Public Health Fund:
Helping to Reduce Rural Health Disparities

Chronic diseases – such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes – are responsible for seven out of 10 deaths among Americans each year and account for 75 percent of the nation's health spending.1 Rural citizens have different challenges than their urban counterparts, including limited or no public transportation, limited access to recreational exercise facilities and full-service grocery stores, lower tax bases and lower economies of scale to sustain a community health infrastructure, and recruiting and retaining qualified public health personnel and their access to specialized training. Residents in rural areas are more likely to lead sedentary lifestyles, consume more calories, use tobacco or abuse alcohol.

The Prevention and Public Health Fund (Fund) provides a critical opportunity to promote health equity and improve the health of communities in greatest need. The Fund will invest $12.5 billion over ten years (FY2013-FY2022) in proven, effective programs to prevent diseases and injury in American communities. This investment in prevention will promote health equity, reduce health care costs, and improve the health of communities across America. Nearly 20% of CDC’s community health investments are targeted to rural communities.

What is Rural?

A county is rural if OMB designates it as "micropolitan" or "neither” metropolitan nor micropolitan. Using U.S. census data, OMB designates all U.S. counties in one of three categories:

- “Metropolitan” with a core urban area of 50,000 or more.
- “Micropolitan” with a core urban area of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000.
- “Neither” which is a county that is neither metropolitan nor micropolitan.

Clinical prevention is not enough: 77% of rural U.S. Counties were designated as “Health Professional Shortage Areas.” The Prevention Fund is critical to reduce the burden of chronic diseases in rural communities by focusing on prevention at a community level and making the healthy choice the easy choice.

The Prevention Fund Investments are Critical for Rural Communities

- The Prevention Fund is already being used to support prevention efforts in rural communities that are proven to make these communities healthier, such as smoking cessation programs, immunizations, disease screening, expanded mental health and injury prevention programs, and programs that promote nutrition and physical activity.
- The Fund makes important investments in strengthening state and local health departments to improve their ability to respond to public health emergencies such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks, provide flu and other immunizations, fight infectious diseases, and protect our food, air, and water.
- The Fund also invests in expanding the public health workforce to provide the well-equipped labs and technology it needs to protect a diverse population from the myriad of health and safety challenges in the 21st century.
Community Transformation Grants Promote Community Prevention

- Community Transformation Grants (CTGs) promote healthy living and reduce rural health disparities by allowing communities to design interventions that meet the most pressing needs of their populations.
- CTGs invest in effective community-based interventions and focus on addressing the leading causes of chronic disease, such as tobacco use, obesity and poor nutrition, as well as health disparities.
- CTGs aim to reduce the obesity rate through nutrition and physical activity interventions by five percent over five years. A Trust for America’s Health report found that a five percent reduction in body mass indices (BMI) rates in the United States could save nearly $30 billion in health care costs in five years, benefitting all Americans, with the most significant gains for disadvantaged populations.

Rural Communities Are at Higher Risk for Preventable Diseases

- One study found that rural children are estimated to be 25% more likely to be overweight or obese than children living in metropolitan areas.
- Adults living in rural counties (28.2%) also have a higher average annual percentage of smoking than adults living in large urban counties (18.5%).
- Another study found 55.6% Non-Hispanic blacks in rural areas obese compared to 43.2% of their urban counterparts.
- 38.4% of Non-Hispanic whites in rural areas obese compared to 32.1% of their urban counterparts.

Prevention of Disease in Rural Communities Reduces Costs

- A study by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies concluded that between 2003 and 2006 the combined costs of health inequalities and premature death totaled to $1.24 trillion.
- It is estimated that per capita medical spending for an obese person is roughly 42 percent higher than an individual of normal weight.
- Obesity is related to more than 30 illnesses, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer; reducing the high rates of obesity in racial and ethnic minorities will help reduce costs associated with preventable health conditions.

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