



November 13, 2017

## **National Rural Health Day**

Rural communities across the country will be celebrating National Rural Health Day on Thursday, Nov. 16 during National Rural Health Week.

We take this day to recognize the important part health care plays in the well-being of our neighbors and our society. Communities are rated, not just on the physical health of their residents, but on their social and economic health.

When thinking about health care in rural Missouri, consider these facts.

- 97% of Missouri's land mass is considered rural.
- 37% of the population resides in rural areas.
- 81 of Missouri's 114 counties are defined as rural.
- 62 of Missouri's 164 hospitals are located in rural counties.
- 23 of Missouri's rural counties that contain a hospital have experienced a trend of declining population.

These facts create challenges for Missouri's hospitals and health care providers that require a sufficient population to support ongoing operations. While rural hospitals develop strategies to mitigate the loss of volume, they must also contend with payment reductions due to sequestration and other payment policy changes, such as the Medicare disproportionate share payments. Hospitals must also consider models to ensure success as payers continue to tie quality outcomes and patient satisfaction to payments. These pressures are significant and affect every rural hospital in the state. Dedicated hospital, health care and community leaders work every day to provide the services necessary to maintain a healthy community.

While a hospital's primary mission is to care for patients, Missouri's rural hospitals also keep local economies healthy. In 2016, Missouri's rural hospitals provided nearly 22,000 high-paying jobs with \$1.6 billion in salary and benefits for rural Missourians. Additionally, the State Office of Primary Care and Rural Health has estimated that the average total direct value added to the economy by Critical Access Hospitals alone was slightly over \$17 million.

Despite the many challenges facing our rural health care communities, significant accomplishments have been made. The National Rural Health Association recognized Lafayette Regional Health Center as a Top 20 Critical Access Hospital for Best Practice in Quality for 2017. Mercy Hospital Washington and Ozarks Medical Center were both honored as Top 100 Rural and Community Hospitals by iVantage Health Analytics. HealthTran, a program to

improve health outcomes by reducing transportation barriers in rural communities, has been recognized nationally as part of the innovative Rides to Wellness project.

Missouri needs its rural hospitals and health care providers. We can't afford to leave this population behind. The Missouri Hospital Association, in cooperation with the Missouri Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, will continue to work towards securing the future of health care in our rural communities.