



Virginia Rural Health Plan 2022-2026



Virginia State Office of Rural Health
Virginia Department of Health



Introduction



Charles City • © Creative Dog Media

Executive Summary

The Virginia State Office of Rural Health (VA-SORH) was established in 1991 to create, fund, and support quality and sustainable rural healthcare infrastructure throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VA-SORH is housed within the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Health Equity, and is the sole organization in Virginia that is federally designated to address and rectify health disparities affecting the state's rural residents. The mission of the office is to partner with rural communities to identify opportunities and long-term solutions that ensure the health and prosperity of all Virginians. The VA-SORH fulfills this mission through providing technical assistance, regulatory updates, resources, and opportunities for collaboration with communities.

Updating the Virginia Rural Health Plan has been a journey as windy as the roads of Virginia's Heritage Music trail. The process began in the spring of 2019 with a series of community conversations intended to gather first-person content for the new plan. The working group in partnership with the Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA) selected eleven rural communities to visit and host community conversations, based on Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Rankings, Appalachian Regional Commission's Economic Distress Index, and Virginia's Health Opportunity Index.

Understanding that rurality is extremely difficult to define, once you've visited one rural community, you have visited one rural community. The working group sought comments from communities that sit in the shadow of urban cores as well as regions which have been chronically under-resourced and have been more traditionally labeled as rural. Rural Virginia's geography extends from the wild horse drawn beaches of the Eastern Shore, to the northwestern mountains of the Shenandoah Valley, to the Appalachian highlands of the southwest, and into the former tobacco regions of Central and Southside Virginia. The plan intends to reflect the uniqueness of each of these very different regions.

Throughout our travels in Virginia's rural communities, the working group made it a point to meet with community leaders and chat with community-based organizations such as the Bland Ministry which operates two free dental clinics, a food bank, community closet, and Head Start child care center. Local community champions facilitated the community conversations over supper. Attendees were asked to provide responses to three questions: What are the good things about your community?; Name one or two things that would improve the health of your community.; and What is wellness and what does it look like here? Participants included local business owners, health care workers, school officials, city and county elected officials, social service providers, and transportation workers, among others. The result is a working action plan reflecting community voices.

Leading up to the March 2020 declaration of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the working group had visited 9 counties and hosted five community suppers. Due to travel restrictions and the need to comply with social distancing recommendations, the working group had to shift it's approach for the remaining community conversations. Key stakeholders and identified leaders provided insight via virtual and telephonic conferencing platforms.

The goal of the 2022-2026 Virginia Rural Health Plan is to showcase the resiliency and highlight the assets of the Commonwealth's rural communities. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light everything known to be true about rural Virginia: the people are spirited, resourceful and can count on one another to create effective local solutions to unique challenges..

In good health,

Virginia Rural Health Plan Working Group

Virginia State Office of Rural Health Priority Metrics

The Virginia State Office of Rural Health has chosen seven priority areas and respective metrics to study and monitor longitudinally. Trends of these metrics will be visualized in a public-facing, interactive dashboard which will be accessible to our partners, stakeholders, policy-makers and the public on the VA-SORH website. These metrics aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the overall health and well-being of Virginia's rural communities.

1. Education

- Child Readiness via Third Grade Standards of Learning Reading Assessment

2. Broadband

- Percentage of Households with Broadband

3. Nutrition and Food Security

- Rates of Food Security
- Rates of Food Insecurity among Households with Children

4. Healthy Moms and Babies

- Adequacy of Prenatal Care Utilization via Kotelchuck Index

5. Access to Health Care Services

- Rates of Avoidable Hospitalizations per 100,000 Residents



Nicole Warner

6. Behavioral Health, Substance Use Disorder and Recovery

- Rates of Emergency Department Visits for Overdose (All Drugs)

7. Employment/Workforce Development

- Earnings/Income per Job
- Employment Rates per Census Tract

The State Office of Rural Health team is committed to continuing its work showcasing Virginia's rural communities, providing technical assistance and resources. A portion of this work will be to measure the impact of this plan and to benefit from continuous community feedback.

Rural Resource Toolkit



The Rural Virginia Initiative (RVI) was the result of legislation passed in the 2018 General Assembly Session that tasked the University of Virginia with leading a conversation on the challenges faced by residents of rural Virginia and to prepare a white paper to recommended solutions. Following initial recommendations, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, UVA-Wise, and Virginia State University convened a broad group of stakeholders from academia, government and the private sector to continue the dialogue. The Healthcare and Community Well-being Working Group sought to address health disparities in rural Virginia. The group collaborated with the Virginia State Office of Rural Health to develop a toolkit of community and academic resources to be included in the State Rural Health Plan. The toolkit contains resources linked to each of the topic areas presented in the plan and the toolkit is accessible online at the VA-SORH website.



Jumping Rocks Photography

Table of Contents

- Defining Rurality in Virginia2-1
- Education as the Backbone in Rural Virginia3-1
- Broadband Internet Supporting Rural Virginia.....4-1
- Healthy Housing5-1
- Transportation.....6-1
- Nutrition and Food Security7-1
- Healthy Moms and Babies.....8-1
- Access to Health Care Services9-1
- Behavioral Health, Substance Use Disorder and Recovery 10-1
- Healthy Minds and Bodies 11-1
- Natural and Built Environments..... 12-1
- Aging in Place and Addressing Social Isolation..... 13-1
- Elevating Rural Workforce Development and Employment..... 14-1
- Financial Proficiency: Leveraging Individualized Resources 15-1
- Acknowledgments..... 16-1
- Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations 17-1
- References..... 18-1



Washington County • Cameron Davidson