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Rural Healthcare Advocates Travel to Washington DC for Largest Rural Health Advocacy Event in the Country

Leadership from the Colorado Rural Health Center met with policymakers in Washington early this month to discuss firsthand the development and implementation of healthcare reform and policy.

DENVER, CO – The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) kicked off its 25th annual Rural Health Policy Institute at our nation’s Capitol earlier this month. Several representatives from Colorado attended the event, including staff and policy experts from the Colorado Rural Health Center (CRHC).

“Not only was this an opportunity to discuss concerns unique to rural healthcare, but also the time for CRHC to advocate on behalf of our members,” says Michelle Mills, chief executive officer and one of four CRHC staff who traveled to D.C.

As the State Office of Rural Health and Colorado’s only rural healthcare association, CRHC represents nearly two hundred hospitals, clinics and other healthcare providers throughout the state.

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), healthcare is changing at a rapid pace and many rural healthcare stakeholders struggle with how to meet current requirements and demands while looking towards and preparing for the future.

In Colorado, despite the current inadequate payment mechanisms and lack of capital, rural hospitals and clinics are moving towards new models of care such as patient-centered medical home, care coordination and quality reporting. “This is a delicate

balance,” said Mills, “since many of our rural hospitals and clinics are facing increasing fiscal limitations.”

With a full time policy and advocacy manager on staff, CRHC is well positioned to serve as the primary source of rural health advocacy in Colorado. “Our goal is to improve the health of rural communities and since 1991, our mission has remained relevant,” says Mills. “Even more so today,” she added.

In preparation for their visit to the Hill, CRHC compiled financial data and health outcome statistics for reports examining rural health data from each rural legislative district in Colorado. “We have the data to support our policy agenda,” said Melissa Bosworth, director of workforce and outreach at CRHC.

The challenge was creating a report that would spark interest and help inform policy makers who do not have time to read long reports. Bosworth added, “During our conversations, the findings were surprising to some and led to informative and innovative discussions into the current state of rural healthcare.” The 2014 Rural Champion Legislator Packets and Infographics are available for download at <http://www.coruralhealth.org/programs/roap/documents/2014.HillPacket.pdf>.

Additional reports and issues papers are available, and CRHC will continue developing such materials examining rural health data, in order to better inform community conversations and create evidenced-based model change innovation.

About The Colorado Rural Health Center

The Colorado Rural Health Center was established in 1991 as Colorado's State Office of Rural Health. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, CRHC's serves dual roles as the State Office of Rural Health with the mission of assisting rural communities in addressing healthcare issues; and as the State Rural Health Association, advocating for policy change to ensure that rural Coloradoans have access to comprehensive, affordable healthcare services of the highest quality. For more information visit www.coruralhealth.org, call 303-832-7493, or call toll free 800-851-6782 from rural Colorado.