



**Connecticut Office of Rural Health
Northwestern Connecticut Community College
4 Park Place East
Winsted, CT 06098**

Health care branching
out
to rural
communities



Connecticut State Office of Rural Health

**2010
Annual Report**

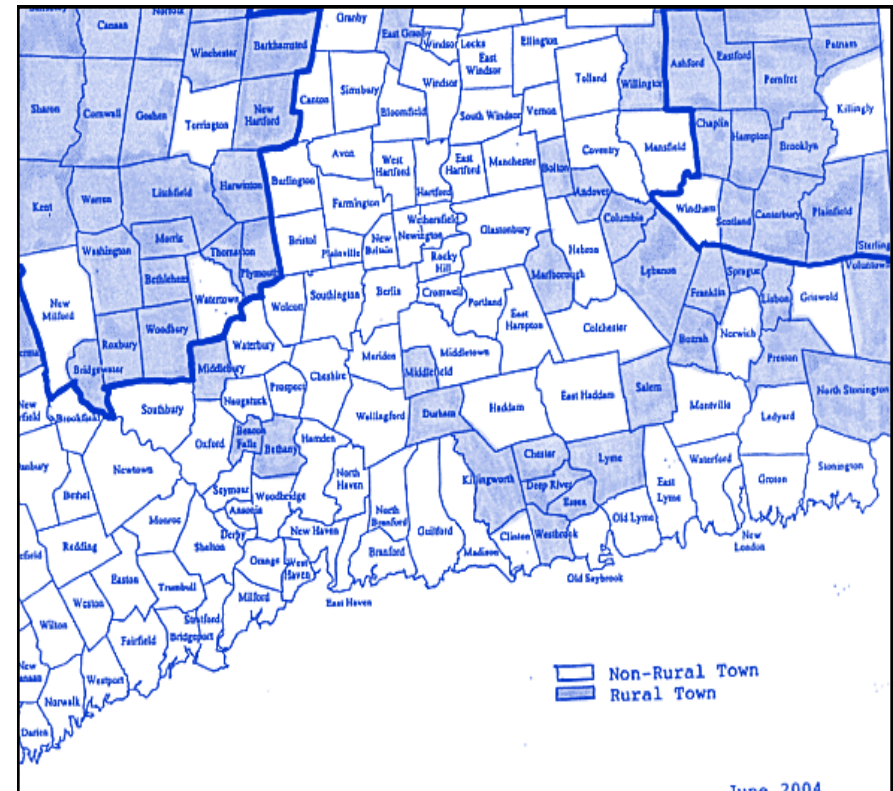
CT Office of Rural Health Mission Statement:

Working together to promote the health of persons living in rural Connecticut through education, communication and partnership, focusing on the enhancement, access and promotion of quality health care for rural Connecticut.

Projects and initiatives from the CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) are funded through the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy grant program, CFDA # 93.913, from the Health Resources & Services Administration. The grant CFDA 93.913 is awarded to Northwestern CT Community College to maintain the CT-ORH. Projects must be consistent with the CT-ORH's mission to support the planning, enhancement, education or evaluation of programs.

Director: Barbara Berger
Projects' Coordinator: Mary Winar

Phone: 860 738-6378
Fax: 860 738-6443
Web address: www.ruralhealthct.org



YEAR IN REVIEW

This second CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) annual report highlights this year's five grant award initiatives and provides an overview of the office's activities for the 2009-2010 grant cycle. The CT-ORH awarded over \$50,000 in grants and project initiatives, which enhanced quality of care for the rural Connecticut residents. For more specific details about the various programs, please contact the CT-ORH.

The CT-ORH was involved again this year in a grant project to enhance hospice services for Veterans living in rural areas of northwestern Connecticut. The VA Connecticut Healthcare System received federal funds for an initiative to increase and strengthen communication with the local NW Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) and to recruit and train Veterans as hospice volunteers for other Veterans needing hospice services. The grant partnership is composed of three rural VNAs, the CT Association for Home Care & Hospice and the CT-ORH. A unique training curriculum which includes modules on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Vet-to-Vet training components was developed last year by this partnership and is expected to be used for training late summer.

Other 2009 - 2010 CT-ORH project activities include:

- Partnering with CT DPH to learn about CT rural youth and young adult suicide and motor vehicle crashes
- Providing grant writing assistance to Northwestern CT Community College to access Congressionally-directed funds for the start-up of the College's new Associate Degree nursing program
- Partnering with the CT Economic Resource Center to design an easily accessible and analyzable electronic format for rural health data

The CT-ORH continues to be a voice for quality rural health care in the state, New England and nationally and through its programs and project activities. The office represents this rural voice to various organizations and committees including:

- CT DPH Disaster Preparedness
- CT DPH Maternal & Child Health Block Grant
- CT DPH Multicultural Health Partnership
- New England Rural Health Roundtable
- National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health
- Torrington Area Health District
- SEARCH program with the Community Health Center Association of CT

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE INITIATIVES

The CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) provided funding to EMS Institute, Inc. located in Sharon, CT and KB Ambulance Corps, Inc. of Danielson, CT to sponsor EMS Management and EMS Leadership education and training sessions. This training is part of a series of eight modules that addresses for their regions a variety of skill sets that enhance and foster successful EMS management and leadership.

In 2009, the EMS Institute sponsored module 1: An introduction to EMS management, module 2: Human Resources will be held September 18, 2010. KB Ambulance Corps sponsored module 2 last spring and in May of this year module 1 was held for 12 participants from four rural EMS provider groups.

The CT-ORH anticipates funding additional modules of this management program in the near future. Program evaluations favorably indicate a need and interest in future offerings.

Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department received grant funds to train and recertify its members and regional community emergency response individuals. MRTs, EMT-B and EMT-I from three area EMS squads participated in two recertification training sessions. Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department functions at an Advanced Life Support level for emergency medical services. The ability to maintain and provide this level of care for the rural residents of Cornwall is crucial because of the greater distance and transport time to area hospitals.



United Services, Inc. MHFA training participants

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMTs

United Services, Inc., a community-based behavioral health center serving eastern Connecticut, received grant funds from the Connecticut Office of Rural Health to provide Mental Health First Aid Training to Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) in rural eastern CT.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a 12-hour award-winning training program designed to educate individuals on how to help someone in a mental health crisis. This program has proven to increase knowledge, reduce stigma and most importantly increase supportive actions. It does not teach people to be therapists, rather, it teaches how to recognize the symptoms of mental health problems, how to provide initial help and how to go about guiding a person toward appropriate professional help.

This training is especially beneficial to EMTs and other emergency first responders, who often encounter individuals suffering from mental illness when responding to emergency calls. An EMS provider in northeastern CT noted 12% of their ambulance calls are primarily mental health related, with still more involving physical health issues in which mental health conditions play a role in response and treatment for the client. This EMS provider stated they have seen an increase in the number of mental health related calls in the first six months of 2010.

Participants in the program learned:

- Signs and symptoms of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, psychosis and addiction
- Techniques to approach someone in a mental health crisis
- Skills to be supportive, diffuse the situation and encourage professional help
- Procedures and steps to take if someone is suicidal, harming themselves or refusing help

Participants engage in experiential activities that build understanding of the impact of mental/behavior health illness and teach how to assess, listen, give reassurance and encourage self-help strategies.

MHFA training is promoted by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare with many professions offering continuing education credits upon completion of the training.

Program evaluations comments:

“The course was a good overview of many mental health crises we may see in EMS. It gave me a better understanding of the wide-array of psychiatric disorders.”

“I learned how to better relate to patients with mental health problems. I gained a better sense of where they are coming from and how I can help them.”

WEBSITE DEVELOPED FOR EASTERN CT SENIORS TO ACCESS HEALTH SERVICES

Windham Hospital, located in Willimantic, CT serves many eastern rural CT residents. The Connecticut Office of Rural Health awarded a grant to Windham Hospital to assess the unmet needs of senior residents in the rural towns of Ashford, Columbia and Willington and for the development of a new website to improve access to quality health care for these rural residents. The website, www.SeniorHealthResourcesCT.org, is a comprehensive compilation of quality and reliable information that guides seniors and their advocates in locating services to help maintain an independent lifestyle.

The easy-to-navigate website includes available current local services such as walk-in health centers, women’s services, cardiac rehabilitation, home care, physical therapy, and many others. Sections on medications, diseases, illnesses & medical conditions, healthy living resources and links, can also be found on the senior health resources website. Users of the website may also access guidance in meeting their health care needs by contacting Tamre Fontaine, RN, a case worker at Windham Hospital. Her email is accessible from the website. The information provided on the website is also relevant to most towns in Eastern Connecticut.

The grant additionally provided funding to develop and implement health education and disease prevention programs at senior centers in the towns of Ashford, Columbia & Willington. For more information on any of these programs, contact Windham Hospital’s Healthy Living Advocate at 860.456.6982 or log onto the website and inquire via email at www.SeniorHealthResourcesCT.org.



Windham Hospital’s Healthy Living Advocate

FALL PREVENTION PROGRAM OFFERED BY POMPERAUG DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Pomperaug District Department of Health collaborated with the Woodbury, Southbury, Bridgewater and Roxbury Senior Centers to provide a Fall Prevention Program for seniors living in these rural communities. A grant from the CT Office of Rural Health provided the funding for the program.

The ten-week fall prevention program is a component of the Live Long, Live Well series of educational programs for seniors. The weekly programs included classes in Tai Chi and educational sessions on balance, medication and fall prevention strategies. The classes began in mid-April ending in mid-June and had a capacity of ten participants.

A public health nurse, health educator, pharmacist, and physical therapist conducted the educational sessions. Topics included: risk factors for falls, how to get up from a fall and how to help someone who has fallen, level 1 balance exercises, home hazards, completing a medication record, nutrition, footwear, sensory problems, and postural hypotension. At each session, level 1 balance exercises were practiced. Participants received educational handouts at each session.

Evaluations from the program were generally positive and most participants expressed an interest in taking additional Tai Chi classes. All four programs saw a fluctuation in attendance from week to week due to scheduling conflicts and medical appointments. Candidates for this program need to be screened and evaluated prior to their participation as many participants were unable to complete the program due to medical and physical limitations. Overall, those who participated agreed they increased their knowledge of fall prevention and benefited from the pharmacist-directed medication review.

The elder Fall Prevention Program with attention to scheduling and screening for appropriateness for the candidates will prove to be more successful and beneficial to all engaged in the activities.

DAY KIMBALL HOSPITAL DEVELOPS A SCREENING AND REFERRAL TOOL FOR ELDERLY

Day Kimball Healthcare (DKH), located in the northeast corner of the state in Putnam, was also a recipient of a 2010 CT Office of Rural Health grant. The grant funds provided the opportunity for DKH to develop and conduct a community-based needs assessment targeting their senior population aged 60 and older. The assessment tool, now referred to as QUEST: Quiet Corner Elder Screening Tool, determines the current use of health care services by seniors and/or their caregivers and identifies unmet needs. QUEST can assess an elder's basic needs in the areas of self-care, nutrition, mental health, mobility, medication issues, financial concerns, insurance, and transportation as well as caregiver stress.

The QUEST tool was shared and piloted with various departments and programs within DKH, including Home Care, Home Makers, Hospice, Outpatient Mental Health, the Emergency Department and also with local primary care providers.

The extensive pilot and evaluation of QUEST met with favorable responses. Physicians, nurses, home care providers, caregivers and elders participated in a survey of the content, need, use and benefit of the tool. All gave the new survey and referral tool positive marks. Health care providers, seniors and caregivers in northeastern CT now have an easy to use standardized reference tool available at their finger tips. QUEST can be found on DKH's website, www.daykimball.org.

