



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



Connecticut State Office of Rural Health

**2011**  
**Annual Report**

**CT Office of Rural Health Mission Statement:**

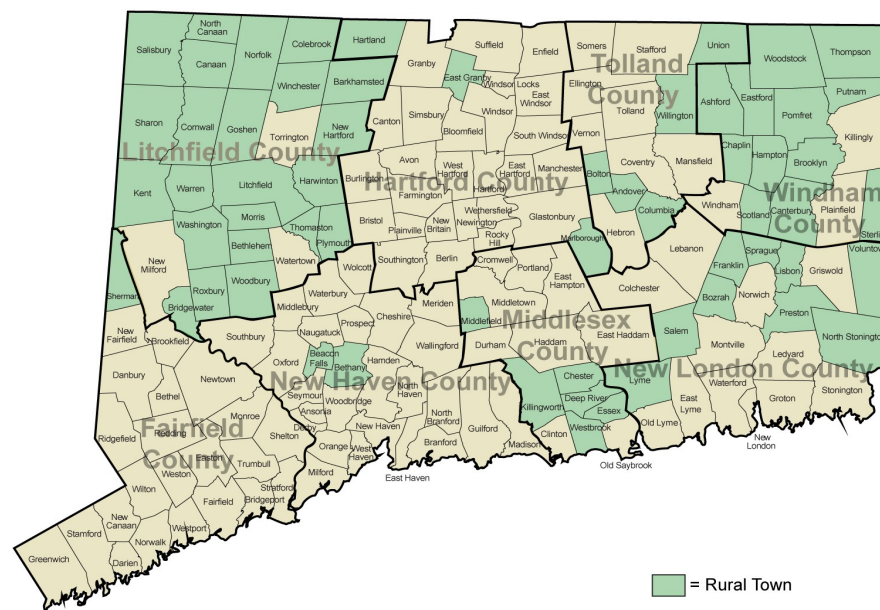
*Working together to promote the health of persons living in rural Connecticut through education, communication and partnership, focusing on the enhancement, access and promotion of quality health care for rural Connecticut*

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.

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## 2010-2011 YEAR IN REVIEW

This annual report highlights the many activities that the Connecticut Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) has undertaken to enhance the quality and access to health care for rural residents of Connecticut during this past 2010-11 grant cycle. The CT-ORH continues to serve the rural towns and providers in partnering and promoting quality rural health care.

Using the new 2010 census data, the Office has updated the list of rural towns it serves. Connecticut lost Durham, Lebanon, Middlebury, and Plainfield, four previously designated rural towns, due to increase in population. There are now 61 rural Connecticut towns, based on the CT-ORH definition, which was adopted in 2004.

*“All towns in a designated Micropolitan Statistical Area with a population of less than 15,000 and those towns in Metropolitan Statistical Areas with a population of less than 7,000 are designated rural for the purposes of the CT Office of Rural Health initiatives.”*

The Rural Health Office is excited and proud of all the work done in assisting Northwestern CT Community College open its new associate degree nursing program in January, 2011. Twenty-four students were accepted into this first class in January with 32 students slated for the second class in January 2012. The students are completing their clinical rotations using various provider sites in Torrington, Sharon, Canaan, Litchfield, Simsbury and Waterbury.

The Office participated in a **Student Experiences And Rotations in Community Health (SEARCH)** grant program through the Community Health Centers Association of CT. This program places students in various community health centers for clinical experiences including Torrington’s Community Health and Wellness Center and Willimantic’s Generations Family Health Center, the two FQHCs serving rural residents. One student was offered a position and accepted. This grant program is helping to meet the need for additional health care providers for our rural areas of the state.

The office partnered with eHealthCT, Connecticut’s Health Information Technology Regional Extension Center working to assist health care providers in converting to electronic health care records and meeting the guidelines for “Meaningful Use” by the established target dates.

Along with the Department of Public Health, the Office completed a study of data specific to childhood injuries (ages 0-24) in rural areas, related to motor vehicle accidents and suicide. Continued work needs to happen to establish next steps in addressing awareness and prevention.

## VISTA Worker comes to CT-ORH

A Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) worker will be serving the rural areas of CT through sponsorship from the New England Rural Health Roundtable Education and Constituent Initiative. The New England Rural Health Roundtable (NERHRT) is a non-profit, membership driven organization composed of a diverse group of individuals and organizations committed to improving health and health care throughout the rural New England communities. The NERHRT, established in 1997 with funding from the National Rural Health Association, serves as a regional rural health advocate for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. The CT VISTA initiative will focus on Rural Mental Health Services for Children. The 12-month VISTA worker will be housed at the Connecticut Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH) located at Northwestern CT Community College, Winsted, CT. The core functions of the Connecticut Rural Mental Health Initiative for Children is to identify mental and behavioral health issues and concerns regarding services and programs available to rural children and their families. Secondly, this initiative will establish a rural network partnership with a mission to engage community and state leaders to address the needs of rural childhood mental and behavioral health services.

The CT-ORH is very happy and excited to welcome VISTA volunteer, Lauren Bouton. She is a graduate of Auburn University and comes to CT from Massachusetts.



## RURAL HOSPITAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The CT-ORH implemented a new grant program in early 2011 for rural hospital quality improvement initiatives. The designated CT rural hospitals include Day Kimball Healthcare, Essent-Sharon, New Milford Hospital, The Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and Windham Memorial Hospital. The purpose of this competitive grant program was to assist these rural hospitals with conducting specific quality improvement initiatives that would positively impact health care for the rural residents each hospital serves.

Grant awards were given to Essent-Sharon Hospital, The Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and Windham Hospital Foundation. All of the hospitals' initiatives included various staff education and training programs.

Essent-Sharon Hospital provided Basic Disaster Life Support (BDLS) Training to supplement the hospital's Disaster Preparedness. Yale New Haven Center of Emergency Preparedness and Healthcare Solutions conducted the training for thirteen Essent-Sharon Hospital employees and two community partners. All participants rated the program as 'excellent'. The program provided the opportunity for the hospital to review and enhance current and future disaster preparedness educational programs. Two drills will be completed by years end.

The Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH) received grant funds to prepare and train an employed Professional Development Specialist to obtain Oncology Nurse Clinician certification. An evaluation of CHH's current oncology chemotherapy practices with a comparison to researched-based best chemotherapy practices is underway. As a result of the training and research an evidence-based standardized chemotherapy practice curriculum will be developed for the nursing staff.

Windham Hospital Foundation's grant initiative supported the hospitals and statewide goal to reduce readmission rates for patients with a diagnosis of heart failure. The hospital conducted educational programs for both licensed and non-licensed staff utilizing the "Teach Back" method to improve communication, health literacy and patient education. Patient education materials were developed in English and Spanish. An evaluation of the education program outcomes is currently in progress.

The **National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network (3RNet)** is a not-for-profit organization helping health professionals and providers find positions and fill openings in rural and underserved areas throughout the country. The CT-ORH membership in this organization allows CT rural health care providers and CT rural facilities free access to this electronic network to advertise and market their provider needs. Employment opportunities for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, dentists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants are first reviewed for approval by the CT-ORH. The job opportunity is then posted to the CT state page on the 3RNet website <http://www.3rnet.org>.

Each year the federal government asks the State Offices of Rural Health to submit data on the number of technical assistance encounters they have directly provided to clients and the total number and types of clients/providers they serve. This year the CT-ORH provided technical assistance through telephone, email interactions, webinar, teleconference and face-to face encounters to over 290. Each year this number grows showing the office's increased outreach throughout the rural areas of the state. The Office continues to work with multiple communities, government officials, academic institutions, associations, agencies, EMS organizations, hospitals, providers and clinics.

Lastly, it is time for me to tell you all that I am retiring as the director of the CT Office of Rural Health. It has been a most wonderful 12-year journey working with people who are so interested and caring for quality health care services for our rural residents. Heather Capabianca has been appointed as the new director and will assume this position the first of September. I want to leave with a special thank you to all of you with whom I have worked. It has been a privilege.

Sincerely,



November 17, 2011

## CT RURAL HEALTH COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

The CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH), through the administration of its Rural Health Grant program awarded grants to rural community agencies/organizations for initiatives that enhanced access to quality health care. The funded initiatives focused on preventive health care, mental/behavioral health, and emergency medical service training. Below is a synopsis of the four funded grant initiatives.

**Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group (TEEG)**, located in North Grosvenordale, received a grant award focusing on preventive health care for women. This agency, incorporated in 1988, provides human services to low-income families and empowers individuals to move beyond poverty. Grant funds were used to hold two Healthy Women's Health Care Forums targeting women of parenting age and older women. The keynote presentations for the "Aging and Still Amazing" forum included a physician, a senior fitness trainer and an elder law attorney. The "Moms in Motion" forum speakers included a family nurse practitioner, a Corrective Holistic Exercise Kinesiology (C.H.E.K) lifestyle coach and a registered dietitian. These two programs provided access to age-appropriate pertinent health care information for women in rural northeast Connecticut. Program evaluations were favorable for offering similar programs in the future.

**Washington Ambulance Association Inc. (WAA)**, received funds for Basic Emergency Medical Technician training. Individuals living in Washington, CT and surrounding rural towns were recruited for this training. Eleven students completed the program with four successfully attaining EMT-Basic certification. The remaining students are currently in various stages of fulfilling requirements to pass their written and/or practical exams. Newly trained EMTs will be joining New Milford, Roxbury, Warren and Washington Ambulance Services. An evaluation of the training program revealed that newly trained EMTs feel somewhat inadequate in their ability to respond to calls. As a response to this concern WAA is in the process of developing and implementing a post EMT Basic Certification program; "WAA Department Training- Skill Qualification Training". A newly appointed Training Officer will work with a small group of identified Mentors/Trainers

to serve as advisors and counselors to enhance the skills and confidence of the newly recruited certified EMTs. It is anticipated this new program will greatly decrease the amount of time it takes to completely orient a new recruit, will increase the level of self-confidence, and increase retention rates for new members. This program is expected to be completely operational by early fall and will be available for replication upon request.

**United Services Inc.**, a community-based behavioral health center, located in Dayville, CT, was awarded a grant to conduct Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for rural Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and Emergency First Responders serving rural Connecticut. MHFA is a 12-hour training program that teaches individuals how to recognize the symptoms of mental health illness, how to provide initial help and how to guide a person toward appropriate professional help. MHFA training is especially beneficial to EMTs and other emergency first responders, who when responding to emergency calls for individuals suffering from mental or behavioral health illness. Two training programs were held in August, one in Dayville at United Services and one in Winsted at Northwestern CT Community College with a total of approximately 45 in attendance. Participants completing the course received a certification in MHFA.

**EMS Institute Inc., (EMSI)** located in Sharon, CT received grant funds to sponsor EMS management and leadership training. EMSI is providing educational support to a network of EMS providers serving the rural towns of Cornwall, Falls Village, Kent, Norfolk, North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon and Warren. This training is a series of eight modules developed by the New England Council for Emergency Medical Services to address a variety of skill sets that enhance and foster successful EMS management and leadership. Module 3: System Finance is an eight hour class with an expected attendance of twenty five rural EMS managers. The class will be held in September. The EMS Institute sponsored module 1: An Introduction to EMS Management in 2009 and module 2: Human Resources in 2010. Participants favorable responses indicated a need to continue offering this modular training program.