

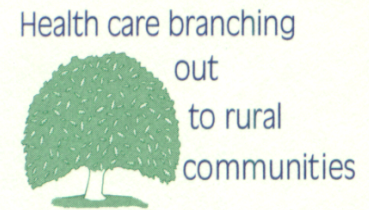
Connecticut Office of Rural Health

2020 Annual Report

Year in Review

This report highlights the funded initiatives and major activities of the CT Office of Rural Health (CT-ORH).

For more detailed information, please contact the CT-ORH directly.



2020 Community Star Gertrude O'Sullivan

The CT-ORH celebrated National Rural Health Day by hosting a virtual celebration to honor Connecticut's 2020 Community Star, Gertrude O'Sullivan. Ms. O'Sullivan, Director of Communications and Special Programs at the Foundation for Community Health (FCH) in Sharon, CT, was selected by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) for this award. She was presented with an official citation by State Representative Maria Horn during the virtual celebration in honor of this achievement.



Ms. O'Sullivan was nominated by colleagues for her skill in identifying partners and creating collaborative initiatives to improve the health and well-being of rural communities. She has helped to steward numerous innovative programs through her work at the FCH, such as the development of the high-school based *Scrubs Club* to foster interest in health careers; creation of the Health Profession Rural Summer Immersion Program to provide medical students with an experience of living and working in rural communities; and establishment of a rural transit service.

A 2020 Community Stars book, featuring all awardees nationally, includes Ms. O'Sullivan's story and is available for viewing at www.powerofrural.org/community-stars/. The CT-ORH congratulates Ms. O'Sullivan on this well-deserved award.

FUNDED INITIATIVES

COVID-19 Response

During 2020, the CT-ORH assisted with several efforts to help address the COVID-19 pandemic in Connecticut's rural communities.

In partnership with the Northwest Coalition of Agencies Related to Elder Services (NW CARES), the CT-ORH supported a study to evaluate the early response to COVID-19 in Northwest Connecticut. Taking a strengths-based approach, the study seeks to understand the organizational and community assets in the area, and to identify areas for future systems strengthening. Study results will be available in 2021. Additional partners in this effort include the Geer Corporation, the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, the Foundation for Community Health and the Northwest CT Community Foundation.

Additionally, the office provided support to the Torrington Area Health District (TAHD) in its work on the front lines of the pandemic response. This work included providing positive case follow-up and contact tracing, and clear guidance on how to properly isolate and quarantine. The health district also provided guidance and consultation to school districts, long-term care facilities, municipalities, first responders, businesses, and others on the implementation of social distancing protocols and guidelines to protect the health of area residents. TAHD serves as the health department for 19 mainly rural towns in Northwest Connecticut.

Opioid Use Disorder

The opioid crisis continues to grow in Connecticut, impacting rural communities throughout the state.

The CT-ORH provided funding to Perception Programs, Inc. (PPI) to enhance recovery services via an innovative mobile app. The behavioral health agency, serving residents in 16 largely rural towns in Northeast Connecticut, expanded access to services for opioid use disorder through the distribution of mobile apps to individuals in or seeking to be in recovery. The app offers a novel approach to outreach and provides tools, including reminders, a sober counter, inspirational daily messages and personal progress tracker to assist individuals in their recovery.

In addition, the CT-ORH provided support to the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force (LCOTF) for both grant-writing and for efforts to recognize first responders, who have worked tirelessly during the pandemic, by showing appreciation with yard signs placed at police, fire and EMS departments. The office also supports the LCOTF as a member of the Executive Committee. The mission of the LCOTF is to reduce opioid use, dependence and overdose in the community by improving access to care, enhancing collaboration and data-sharing, and increasing prevention, safety and treatment awareness.

Data

United Services, Inc. (USI) is a non-profit behavioral health center providing mental and behavioral health education, prevention, treatment and social services to 21 towns in Northeast CT, an area which is recognized as medically under-resourced. With support from the CT-ORH, USI engaged the CT Data Collaborative for an analysis to tell the demographic and economic story of Connecticut counties, and their health needs and disparities, in a compelling data set. The link to the analysis can be found at countystories.ctdata.org/.

Connecticut County Data Stories



About

Connecticut County Data Stories project was developed by CTData Collaborative to show how the 8 Connecticut counties compare in economy and demographics.



Workforce

Beginning in 2018, the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) and the CT-ORH began partnering to bring 3RNet, a health care workforce recruitment and retention tool, to community health centers. CHCACT offers 3RNet services to its members throughout the state to help attract health care providers to underserved communities. In 2020, the CT-ORH continued its on-going support of this initiative.

The CT-ORH also provided support to assist with the marketing of Northwestern Connecticut Community College's (NCCC) health education programs, employing cable television advertising and a pamphlet mailing campaign. Located in Winsted, CT, NCCC is a nationally ranked community college with an award-winning nursing program. Many NCCC graduates remain in the community, providing an essential workforce for the region.

Training

As a part of the CT-ORH mission to support training and education for health care organizations, the office provided funding for several Connecticut-based grant writers to attend a Grant Writing Institute offered by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health. The Institute, which has a rural health focus, is offered annually as a webinar series for beginning grant writers.

ACTIVITIES

Health Equity

The CT-ORH partnered with Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH) and the Northwest CT Community Foundation on the Health Enhancement Communities (HEC) initiative during 2019-2020. The HEC initiative was launched by the CT Department of Public Health and the Office of Health Strategy with the goals of improving the health and well-being of all residents in Connecticut and reducing the trend of rising health care costs by improving community health, health equity, and preventing poor health.

The HEC health priorities are to improve child well-being and to improve healthy weight and physical fitness across the lifespan, with both goals grounded in health equity and informed by community member input. CHH led the effort in Northwest Connecticut, resulting in the establishment of a steering committee and in-depth data and community engagement reports, including feedback provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reports, authored by EdAdvance, a Regional Education Service Center, can be found on the CT-ORH website.

Rural Hospitals

As a result of the shared efforts of the Division of Strategic National Stockpile (DSNS), the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) and the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), the CT-ORH was able to communicate the availability of ventilators to be distributed to rural hospitals in the state. In the Fall of 2020, a total of 6 ventilators were distributed to Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, Sharon Hospital and Day Kimball Hospital.

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