Health Policy: The Process of Advocacy for Change in Rural America

Political Science/MPA 535 Public Organizations
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Established in 1980, at The University of North Dakota (UND) School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Grand Forks, ND
One of the country’s most experienced state rural health offices
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- Educating and Informing
- Policy
- Research and Evaluation
- Working with Communities
- American Indians
- Health Workforce
- Hospitals and Facilities

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Today’s Objectives/Questions

• What are the rural health issues and conditions?

• What is the health policy process – formal and informal?

• How does the health policy process work to advance rural health concerns and needs or how does rural health work within or use that process?

• Who are key actors in rural health policy development?

• What are some examples of successful rural health policy?

Ultimately Public Policy Originates from Our Values

“It is not what we have that will make us a great nation. It is how we decide to use it.”

Theodore Roosevelt

“Vision is the art of seeing things invisible”

Jonathan Swift

“Americans can always be relied upon to do the right thing... after they have exhausted all the other possibilities”

Sir Winston Churchill
What are the rural health issues and conditions?

What is Rural Health?

- Rural health focuses on *population health* and *improving health status* but with an emphasis on *access* to essential health services, health *equity*, and health *delivery systems*
  - Quality of care, access to care and services, availability of care and services, cost of care, ability to afford care, health promotion and disease prevention, disease management, financing, health system viability, community viability, population change, economics – “*drivers*”

- Rural health relies on *infrastructure*: facilities, providers, services, and programs available to the public (all with quality, access, and cost implications)
  - Some are for-profit and some private or public non-profit entities
  - More and more health networks – independence with collaboration
    - Examples include: Community hospitals, clinics, public health, EMS, nursing homes/aging services, home health, behavioral/mental health, dental, pharmacy, and others

- Rural health is *not simply urban health* in a rural or frontier area
What is Rural Health?

**Philosophy:** rural people have the **same right** to expect healthy lives and access to care as do urban people – *fairness frame (health equity)*
- Access essential services locally or regionally
- Access to specialty services through network arrangements
- Quality of care on par with urban
- Availability of technology and a well trained workforce

**Rural health is very community focused – interdependence frame**
- Integral part of what a community is and how people see themselves
- Community engagement – public input is fundamental
- Sectors: Economic/business, public/government, education, faith/church, and health/human services
- Direct services provided to the public and secondary impact for other sectors
- Major employer

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**Environmental Conditions**
- Demographics
- Economics
- Policy
- Health Status
- Workforce
- Finance
- Technology
- Health System Change
- Rural Community Culture & Dynamics

**Impact on Community or Health Organization**
- Threat to survival
- Growth/Decline
- Identity
- Perception toward change
- Perception toward opportunity
- How we respond

**Community Action**
- What do people think, want, or need?
  - Assessments
  - Forums-Discussions
  - Interviews
- Community Ownership (not health system ownership)
  - Collaboration
  - Inclusion
  - Participation
  - Interdependence
- Community Capacity
  - Skills and knowledge
  - Leadership development
  - Planning and advocacy
  - Manage change – non reactive

Source: Brad Gibbens, Deputy Director
UND Center for Rural Health
### Comparative Rural and Urban Strengths and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong informal support network</td>
<td>More stable economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>Availability of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohesive</td>
<td>Availability of professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Established interdependence</td>
<td>Growing and diverse population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Change is natural</td>
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<td><strong>Weaknesses:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skewed population demographics</td>
<td>Lack of cohesiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluctuating economy</td>
<td>Limited informal support</td>
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<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>Competition among providers</td>
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<td>Shortage of professionals</td>
<td>Competition for fundraising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of resources</td>
<td>More contentious-fractionalized</td>
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**What are Some Important Rural Health Issues?**

**Do they have Policy Implications?**

- Access to and availability of care
- Financial concerns facing rural hospitals and health systems
- Health workforce
- Quality of Care
- Health Information Technology
- Networks – rural hospitals, urban hospitals, clinics, others
- Emergency Medical Services – EMS, ambulance, quick response units
- Community and Economic Development
- Health System Reform

*Sources: 2008 Flex Rural Health Plan, 2009 Environmental Scan, and community presentation feedback surveys 2008-2012*
What is the health policy process – formal and informal?

Health Policy – The Formal Side

• Executive – Legislative Process (Congress and the Federal Agencies)
  o White House Rural Council to Strengthen Rural Communities
  o Senate Rural Health Caucus – history in North Dakota - 1985
  o House Rural Health Care Coalition - 1987
  o Senate Finance, Senate HELP, Senate Energy and Natural Resources, Senate and House Indian Affairs, House Ways and Means, Senate and House Appropriations (Senator Hoeven), Senate and House Budget Committees (role of Senator Conrad)

o Federal Agencies
  ➢ US Department of Health and Human Services
    ✓ HRSA and within it – Office of Rural Health Policy, SORH, FLEX, Rural Health Grants, Rural Health Advisory Council, Bureau of Primary Health Care – Community Health Centers, Bureau of Health Professions – healthcare workforce issues, Bureau of Clinician Recruitment and Services – National Health Service Corps
    ✓ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) – Medicare reimbursement and rules, CMS Innovation Grants for health reform
    ✓ CDC – Community Transformation Grants
  ➢ USDA – Rural Development program has Community Facility loan/loan guarantee/grant program for capital improvement
  ➢ USDHUD – HUD 242 program for capital loans to rural hospitals
  ➢ Veterans Administration – access to care, VA hospitals, VA CBOC (community based outpatient clinics, mental health
Health Policy – The Informal Side

• Setting the Agenda (prior to formal policy formulation and during development)
  o Advocacy
    ➢ Interest groups play significant role
      ✓ Content experts – know the details – provide information (fact sheets, reports, meetings with staff, calls from staff)
      ✓ Represent a point of view
      ✓ Relied upon by policy staff – develop close working relationships
      ✓ Interest groups want to be relied upon, “at the table”
    ➢ Important Rural Health Interest Groups
      ✓ National Rural Health Association (NRHA)
      ✓ National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH)
      ✓ RUPRI (other federally supported rural health research centers)
      ✓ American Hospital Association
      ✓ State Rural Health Associations - NDRHA
      ✓ American Medical Association
      ✓ National Nursing Association
      ✓ American Public Health Association

• Managing and influencing the agenda
  o Control the information flow – resource to staff
  o Information – formal testimony, research, fact sheets but also behind the scene
  o Be honest and reliable (VERY IMPORTANT is YOUR CREDIBILITY) – your utility to staff is your reliability and your information
  o If you don’t know say you don’t know but will find out

• Re-setting the agenda
  o Continuous involvement with interest groups to prepare for next round
  o Continuous involvement with policy staff – preparing them, helping them to see the implications of policy, determining what needs to be changed, provide evidence and data
  o Common questions –“What does this mean in North Dakota” “Is there an impact for us”
How does the health policy process work to advance rural health concerns and needs?

or

How does rural health work within the process or use that process?

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So Really, How Does Rural Health Policy Work or Happen?

- Advocacy
  - Interest groups determine their agenda – internal process
  - Interest groups often form alliances with others – share agendas, “back-scratching” – to build greater numbers
  - Message framing – what messages work on policy makers, what do they like to hear, what format or communication strategy works best
    - Research shows for rural message framing concepts like “fairness” and “interdependence” work
      - People who live in rural ND should have the same expectation for quality care as urban, have reasonable access to care, have access to a physician (equity)
      - Rural providers use networks and collaborate – avoid duplication, efficiency, effectiveness (interdependence)
      - Under ACA movement to outcome based reimbursement or pay for performance --- frame as “merit pay” to providers
  - Redundancy and repetition of messages are “positive” in policy – say the same thing over and over, try to have others (alliance partners) say your message
Five Key Points on Policy Advocacy

• Policy is a continuous process
  o Congressional sessions begin and end, but the process of forming policy, influencing policy, changing policy, advocating for policy is ongoing
  o ACA is not the final Act in health reform – each Congress and President will make changes (every year multiple bills just on Medicare which goes back to 1965)
• Important to have partners, allies, coalitions, alliances – forge relationships, cultivate relationships – some short term, some long lasting
  o Organizations similar and even dissimilar to your organization
  o Relationships with policy makers and staff
• Extremely important to be a resource to policy staff
• Recognize there is a relationship between policy formulation and implementation with research and evaluation – rural paid price in early ‘80’s because no formal advocacy or policy structure
• Important to have a legislative champion/advocate

Importance of Having Partners

• Strength in numbers – more voices with same message
• Redundancy in policy can actually be good – more voices, same message
• An association if it is the primary advocate needs it members involved (elected officials like “real people”) but also other associations and their members) – CAH administrators on hill visits
• Identify the commonality of issues and forge alliance around that subject – may be secondary for other association but can add to their message
  o Hospital Association and SORH – rural health outreach grant funding
• Need to be willing to make compromises – more and more important
• Willingness to support partner on their issues makes it easier for them to support you on your issues – their primary is your secondary issue, and your primary is their secondary issue, “you got to give to get in politics”
What are some examples of successful rural health policy?

But First a History Lesson!

- 1973 - 1st State Office of Rural Health in North Carolina
- 1980 - Center for Rural Health created in North Dakota – 5th overall
- 1983 – NRHA formed from merging two smaller rural and/or primary care oriented associations
- 1983 – Congress implements Prospective Payment System (PPS) Medicare Reimbursement
- 1985 – NRHA with leadership from Kevin Fickenscher, President of NRHA and Director of CRH works with Senator Mark Andrews and Senator Quentin Burdick of ND to create Senate Rural Health Caucus
- 1987 – House Rural Health Care Coalition created
- 1987 – Congress creates federal Office of Rural Health Policy
- 1988 – ORHP creates Rural Health Research Center program
- 1991 - ORHP creates SORH program and Rural Health Outreach Grant
- 1993 – NOSORH created
- 1997 – Congress passes CAH designation and Rural Hospital Flexibility
Rural Health Policy in Action

• Rural Hospital Flexibility Program – “Flex program”
  o Alliance of NRHA, NOSORH, AHA, SORHs, and State RHA
  o NOSORH Policy Committee based on regional reps
  o Each state worked with their congressional offices
  o 1st year grant for $200,000 went to SORHs in eligible states
  o Flex funded at $26 million a year
    ➢ Grants to 45 eligible states
    ➢ Flex Monitoring Team (RHRC research related to Flex and rural hospitals – evaluation leads to better data for congressional advocacy)
  o Flex is administered, like SORH, through ORHP
  o State programs educate and inform policy makers
  o NRHA, NOSORH, and AHA push every year continued appropriation for Flex

• Rural Health and the Affordable Care Act
  o Basically, every health interest group had a stake
  o NRHA position papers and fact sheets
  o Formed core set of expectations
    ➢ Health workforce
    ➢ Provider reimbursement
    ➢ Protect (and even expand) rural safety net – CAH, RHC, CHC
    ➢ Access for rural people – financial concerns, but also availability of providers and financial viability rural health providers
  o NRHA worked with AHA and NOSORH
  o State level work with congressional offices on needs and impact
  o CRH emphasized health workforce, safety net, availability of providers, and financial viability of rural health providers and systems
Contact us for more information!

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