

**For Immediate Release**  
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**Contact: Katherine Herring**  
[kherring@capstrat.com](mailto:kherring@capstrat.com)  
**919 745 3686**

**State and Local Leaders, Rural Residents Partner  
to Create First Comprehensive Rural Health Action Plan**

*North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force on Rural Health releases  
plan to improve health and economic outcomes in rural communities*

**RALEIGH, N.C.** – On Monday, the [North Carolina Institute of Medicine](#) (NCIOM) Task Force on Rural Health (Task Force) released the first comprehensive [North Carolina Rural Health Action Plan](#) that sets forth recommendations to reduce health disparities and increase economic stability across North Carolina’s rural communities. The Action Plan, with six priority areas, identifies strategies at the state and local levels that range from behavioral health to childhood development to investments in high-speed broadband Internet – all of which focus on increasing the health and well-being of rural North Carolina.

For the first time, the Task Force went to local areas across rural North Carolina to learn from the experts – those who call rural North Carolina home – to gather critical input used in developing the Action Plan.

“Rural North Carolina faces unique challenges that must be addressed to improve health outcomes,” said Dr. Adam Zolotor, MD, DrPH, Interim President and CEO, North Carolina Institute of Medicine. “Improving health outcomes in rural North Carolina is more than simply bringing doctors and hospitals to less populated areas. It’s about strengthening economic opportunities, investing in education and ensuring that rural North Carolinians are equipped with the resources they need to flourish. It will require hard work and collaboration, but with the right plan and tools in place, we will see results.”

One in five North Carolinians, almost 2.2 million people, live in 60 rural counties – 28 in the Coastal Plain, 14 in the Piedmont and 18 in the Mountains. Rural North Carolina has a rich cultural and industrial heritage, people who are self-reliant and innovative, and a strong sense of community. People from rural communities are less likely to have access to health services, are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors and have a higher mortality rate on average than North Carolinians living in non-rural areas.

North Carolina’s health disparities go far beyond health care. In recent years, the struggling manufacturing and agricultural industries have created an increasing gap between North Carolina’s rural and urban counties. More rural residents live below the poverty line, which is directly tied to poor health.

To increase economic security and thus the overall level of health among rural residents, the Action Plan calls on the General Assembly, health care and business leaders, and local communities to implement short- and long-term plans and programs geared toward improving the economic stability of local communities.

“This is a strong, action-oriented plan that ties health improvement to the long-term vitality of these rural communities,” said Allen Smart, Vice President of Programs, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. “There are some clear next steps outlined in the report, and we are calling on the public and private sectors to continue working closely with rural residents and communities to tackle these problems head-on.”

The Task Force on Rural Health is a collaboration made up of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM), the Office of Rural Health and Community Care (ORHCC), the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust and other partners.

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**About the North Carolina Institute of Medicine**

The North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) is an independent, quasi-state agency that was chartered by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1983 to provide balanced, nonpartisan information on issues of relevance to the health of North Carolina’s population.

The NCIOM convenes task forces, or working groups, of knowledgeable and interested individuals to study complex health issues facing the state in order to develop workable solutions to address these issues.

**More information:**

Contact Dr. Adam Zolotor, Interim President and CEO, North Carolina Institute of Medicine, 919-815-4302 or [adam\\_zolotor@nciom.org](mailto:adam_zolotor@nciom.org)

The full report is available at [www.nciom.org](http://www.nciom.org).