

NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID
Wednesday, February 3, 2021
9:00-10:00am
Notes

Hugh Tilson, Director of NC AHEC, opened the meeting with a message to the community that the NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID is working to gather information from rural areas regarding what is working and what is not in the fight against COVID, and provide feedback to the Office of Rural Health to improve the lives of rural citizens.

Patrick Woodie, President of the NC Rural Center, added that the rural communities face unique challenges, and each community has its own particular needs. Accurate and current information about what is happening in specific locations is essential for providing communities' needs and the coalition is providing a feedback loop. Rural areas include an older population than the rest of the state who are some of the most vulnerable to COVID. African-American and Latino families, especially those in farm communities, have been hard hit.

The same challenges have confronted rural areas before COVID, but are more visible due to the pandemic. These three issues are a priority.

1. Rural broadband is needed for healthcare, education and life needs.
2. Healthcare delivery to rural areas needs to be robust and accessible. Many facilities in rural areas have closed. The number of uninsured families in NC pre-pandemic was 600k; currently it's 1.2m, and is disproportionately rural.
3. The small business community needs a rapid recovery loan program. Eight Community development financial institutions (CDFIs) have provided 1700 loans to small businesses across the state, valued at more than \$100m in emergency bridge loan funding. Small businesses employing less than 50 and less than 10 employees, plus entrepreneurs, need to be a focal point. Big solutions are needed for big problems. The state faces major challenges and political will and the will of North Carolinians is needed to find solutions. If these issues are resolved, people may start migrating to rural communities.

NC Rep. James Gailliard, Pastor of Word Tabernacle Church in Rocky Mount, noted that NC has more churches than any other state, and their value is unrecognized by the State of NC. As trusted community leaders with a weekly audience, they need to advocate for a role in disseminating information to the communities. He added that familiar faces need to be included in videos and infomercials to add validity to their messages. He suggested putting clinic sites at churches where people can be tested for and vaccinated for COVID. Word Tabernacle Church is working with UNC Gillings School of Public Health and Pfizer on messaging. Vidant has offered its parking lot for vaccine distribution. The NC Ministerial Alliance and Area L AHEC are developing a robust faith entity. Word Tabernacle has offered broadband access from its parking lot.

Dawn Daly-Mack, RN, ACO Care Coordinator of the Rural Health Group discussed testing, training and vaccine distribution. She has heard from those who are eligible to receive the vaccine, but have not done so, express concerns about the safety, effectiveness, and trustworthiness of the vaccine. Health liaisons attempt to address the concerns, dealing with a broad range of backgrounds in the community from those who are illiterate to retirees to health care workers. She encouraged transparency and honesty in communications, and suggested that those who have received the vaccine post their

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reactions on social media and share with family and friends. More vaccine is needed in rural communities and there is a waiting list of 1,000 currently.

Juvenio Rocha-Peralta, NC Covid-19 Task Force member and Association of Mexicans in NC, Inc. (AMERICAN) stated that the Latino community comprises 10% of the population of North Carolina, but is invisible to state and local branches of government. They have been heavily impacted by COVID-19 and face struggles with community planning and infrastructure. He expressed an urgent need for local counties to take the lead to develop a community plan, in tandem with local organizations involved in the daily life of Latinos. The healthcare system, health department and healthcare centers need to develop action steps.

The NC COVID-19 task force was established in March and meets weekly to discuss issues related to COVID-19. Work groups have been established across state and local agencies and non-profits. He encouraged appointing minorities within circles of leadership.

Calvin Allen, Program Director of NC Rural Forward, Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation, asked panelists questions from the webinar participants. Topics included:

- Broadband issues – telehealth is working, but more access is needed.
- The need for one statewide repository to connect faith based organizations and information. This could assist with announcing the location of mobile vaccine sites, and sharing other critical information. Financial support is needed.
- Equitable vaccine distribution – the state dashboard will start housing race and ethnicity, which will result in a reallocation of vaccine distribution. There are many systemic issues due to the newness of COVID.
- Best practices on trusted resources are needed, which changes across counties. A toolbox is being developed to address them.
- Some nursing home staff are reluctant to receive the vaccine. New messaging must be used to address the urgency for them to be vaccinated to control the spread of COVID.
- Mass vaccination centers are in urban areas. How can rural areas get more vaccine? DHHS is pushing for equitable distribution. Concerns about staffing, logistics, transportation, refrigeration and access are being addressed. North Carolina currently receives 120K vaccines/day, which is a small number compared to need. Time is needed to work out these infrastructure issues. Counties need advisory councils to deal with populations' needs accurately.
- County lines are not being respected for vaccine distribution. Vaccines are a federal government asset and their criteria demands access for everyone.
- Waiting lists are problematic to manage. Staffing, additional phone lines and client safety need to be addressed.
- Transportation issues -CPTA is offering free rides to people getting vaccinated. Some counties are providing grants.
- Half of the Latino population lacks state identification documents. Change and develop policies to address the disaster needs in communities. Implement strategies to address disparities,

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Kelly Calabria, President & CEO of the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation closed the meeting by sharing some tools for participants.

NC RAC (Resilient American Communities)

www.resilientamericancommunities.org

NCCARE360

<https://nccare360.org/>

DHHS COVID Dashboard

<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard>

Find My Spot

myspot.nc.gov/map-view

Find My Vaccine Group

findmygroup.nc.gov

NCDHHS COVID-19 Vaccine Info.

yourspotyourshot.nc.gov

COVID-19 Vaccine Help Center

The newly expanded COVID-19 vaccine help center can be reached at **888-675-4567**

Monday through Friday 7 a.m. until 7 pm

Saturday and Sunday 8 a.m. until 4 pm

Callers can get help with general COVID-19 vaccine questions, information on eligibility groups, clinical questions about the vaccine, how to find vaccine locations, and transportation services. The COVID-19 vaccine help center supports English and Spanish calls, and TTY. Callers will be able to select call back assistance where they receive a call when agents are available instead of waiting in line for an agent. The language line will be available for all other languages needed.

Post meeting addendum Resilient American Communities

As more communities are deciding to partner with Resilient American Communities, the RAC Team has produced a training series to meet the increasing interest and needs. Below is the Training Schedule to introduce your community members to RAC and its processes and tools. To learn more about the training offerings and to register, click the links below.

List of Events

https://resilientamericancommunities.org/?post_type=tribe_events&eventDisplay=list

Monthly Calendar display

https://resilientamericancommunities.org/?post_type=tribe_events&eventDisplay=month

The next meeting of the NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID will be Wednesday, February 10 at 9:00am.