

Executive Summary

A **Rural Health Strategic Planning** effort for New Mexico was initiated with support from the National Conference of State Legislatures. The goal of the effort was to develop consensus recommendations for improving health status and health services in rural New Mexico.

A core planning group convened in Denver during the initial phase of the project. Members included New Mexico legislators, New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) staff, and representatives of key health service and health provider organizations. Preliminary plans were established for the initiative and NMDOH was asked to be the facilitator of the planning process. Following the initial meeting additional members were invited to participate as part of the Planning Workgroup. These additional members included representatives of health provider associations and health professional education institutions.

The rural health planning process had five separate stages. The Planning Workgroup:

- Established a **consensus definition of rural**;
- Conducted a **preliminary rural health priority assessment**;
- Conducted an in-depth **rural health status and health services assessment**;
- Collected input on **rural health priorities of local communities and stakeholders**; and
- Developed **specific program and policy recommendations**.

The Planning Workgroup and its committees conducted the planning process as outlined. After completing all assessments and collecting input from local communities and stakeholders the Planning Workgroup compiled the following set of consensus recommendations for improving health status and health services in rural New Mexico

- **Expand State Loan Repayment Program** to include behavioral health professionals.
- **Restore Rural Primary Health Care Act Program (RPHCA) funding** to previous appropriation level.
- **Expand funding for State Loan Repayment Program awards**.
- **Expand Rural Health Care Practitioner Tax Credit Program** to include additional behavioral health providers, including LISWs.
- **Implement and provide funding to support a statewide tele-behavioral health network**.
- Provide additional **funding under RPHCA to support substance use disorder services**.
- **Expand the number of behavioral health investment zones** and engage additional local governments in coordinated approaches to these needs.