



## CONNECTING RURAL GEORGIANS WITH COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

**Community Health Workers (CHWs)** play an essential role in increasing health access in rural areas where health services are limited, particularly services that offer culturally competent care. These frontline health workers are trusted members of and/or have a demonstrated working knowledge of the community they serve.

### RURAL GEORGIA IS IN CRISIS

Georgia is ranked among the worst 10 states for most health measures, and the problem is worse in rural areas. For example, rural Georgians are more likely to suffer from heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and cancer than their urban counterparts.

There is also a severe provider shortage:

- **64 of 159** counties lack a pediatrician
- **79** counties lack OB/GYN services
- **9** counties are without physician services

Overall, rural Georgians lack affordable and proper access to health care.

### MAJOR BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE IN RURAL GEORGIA

- 1** At least 38% of rural Georgians are uninsured and low-income, compared to 30% in urban areas.
- 2** Rural Georgia has experienced a significant number of hospital closures in recent years.
- 3** Georgia ranks 40th in the United States for adequate distribution of physicians by specialty and geographic location.
- 4** Residents in some rural communities travel over 50 miles to reach a hospital.



**76,000** rural Georgians are caught in the health insurance "coverage gap," unable to qualify for government-subsidized health insurance and unable to afford private insurance.

### CHWs CAN HELP RURAL GEORGIANS BY:

- Connecting them with free or lower-cost care access opportunities;
- Providing health screenings, referrals, and educational materials;
- Transporting them to health clinics and providers;
- Assisting with insurance coverage processes and applications;
- Offering social support in the form of cultural and language translation and interpretation; and
- Helping them prevent or manage chronic conditions.

### ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY IN RURAL GEORGIA

"Health equity" or "equity in health" implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential."

The health crisis in rural Georgia is an equity issue. Every Georgian deserves the opportunity reach their full potential and should not be disadvantaged by their geographic location. CHWs have a crucial role to play in addressing this crisis and advancing health equity. If you are interested in learning more or advocating for Community Health Workers, consider joining the **Georgia Community Health Worker Advocacy Coalition**. To learn more, visit [www.georgiawatch.org](http://www.georgiawatch.org).