



**Written Testimony of**  
The Rural Health Education Network of Schoharie, Otsego and Montgomery County

New York State Joint Legislative Public Hearing on  
2015-16 Executive Health Budget  
Monday, February 2nd, 2014  
10:00 AM

Chairs:  
Senator Kemp Hannon  
Assemblyman Richard Gottfried

Submitted by:  
Thomas E. Hohensee, MA, Network Director

I write on behalf of the Rural Health Education Network of Schoharie, Otsego and Montgomery counties (RHENSOM). The RHENSOM mission is to address under-served rural community health needs, which have been identified through research, by promoting excellence and innovation in health education. The network is comprised of community partners in public health, the private sector, the media, schools, health systems and health and human service agencies. Our longstanding network has resulted in an enhanced and expanded rural health care delivery system by providing education and facilitating activities within communities that create a new paradigm of cooperative health care among individuals, their providers and their communities. Our network is instrumental in providing or facilitating the community referral needed by health care systems, allowing individuals greater responsibility for their own health and for the health of their communities. Actively connecting regional health care providers, patients and communities will contribute to overcoming health care access disparities unique to our rural area.

The Executive Health Budget will effectively further marginalize the rural health needs of our citizens by shortchanging programs vital to rural health. Our coalition of Rural Health Networks provide key resources and engage critical stakeholders to allow rural communities to participate in emerging health reform initiatives including the State Health Innovation Plan (SHIP), the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program, the Population Health Improvement Plan (PHIP) and the NYS Prevention Agenda. The Governor's budget which would cut the Rural Health Network Development and Rural Health Access programs by 15.1% will reduce access to quality care, increase health care costs in these regions and deal a blow to increasingly important population health initiatives.

The Governor's budget proposal also melds these two proven rural health programs with seven disparate Health Workforce Development initiatives. We believe that bundling the rural health programs with workforce development is inappropriate and respectfully ask that the Legislature



return the rural health programs to their own line items and restore their 2014-15 budget amounts of \$6.4 million for Rural Health Network Development and \$9.8 million for Rural Health Care Access.

Because of the funding support to the Rural Health Network Development program, new and synergistic cross-disciplinary partnerships have been established among and between health systems, state agencies community based organizations, FQHCs, private practices, health and human service agencies and the community at large. Leveraging these resources and dollars has positioned the Rural Health Network Development program to directly impact goals for the Prevention agenda, DSRIP, NYSHIP, Medicaid Redesign Team/ ACA, regional health planning and the Triple Aim Initiative's goals.

Specific functions of our RHENSOM network are to bring about the expansion and broadening of evidence-based educational campaigns for the prevention and management of obesity-associated chronic diseases, dental health and hygiene education for children to prevent periodontal disease and future associated chronic diseases. Nutritional education and oral health and hygiene is provided in area schools in collaboration with our regional School-based Health Centers. School cultures are changing through facilitation of school Wellness Committee activities and expanded evidence-based programs are leading students to consciously connect the consequences of their food choices and physical activity on their weight and health. This framework is also impacting the health in health care, community and work site sectors. The RHENSOM network is an established, credible, respected and valued community partner having collaborated on a number of NYSDOH-funded regional programs. The network has contributed to community health assessments and improvement plans, actively seeks opportunities for synergistic partnerships and remains nimble in filling gaps in community need where possible as the needs of our rural citizens increase and resources continue to dwindle.

RHENSOM is but one example of a coalition of committed organizations and individuals that make up these networks who are passionately committed to the critical need to support the health and well-being of our rural communities. Funding that goes to address the unique needs of rural communities is having significant impact and the return on this investment is paying in quality outcomes. We strongly oppose bundling of the rural health programs with workforce development and respectfully ask that the Legislature return the rural health programs to their own line items and restore their 2014-15 budget amounts of \$6.4 million for Rural Health Network Development and \$9.8 million for Rural Health Care Access.

Be well, and my thanks for giving this important issue your thoughtful consideration.

Please contact me if you would like further information.

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