

### Rural Health Panel

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health  
Office of the Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
By email to [OASHPrimaryHealthCare@hhs.gov](mailto:OASHPrimaryHealthCare@hhs.gov)

RE: Request for Information: HHS Initiative to Strengthen Primary Health Care

The Rural Policy Research Institute Health Panel was established in 1993 to provide science-based, objective policy analysis to federal lawmakers. The Panel is pleased to respond to this Request for Information. Our response focuses on implications for delivering primary care in rural communities.

- Since primary care is the foundation of the rural healthcare system, the RUPRI Health Panel is strongly supportive of CMS's efforts to strengthen primary care in the U.S. Furthermore, we are strongly supportive of the primary care recommendations proposed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Committee on Implementing High-Quality Primary Care (the Committee).
- Team-based care is central to the Committee's primary care recommendations. Healthcare teams may include physicians, advanced practice providers, public health officials, care coordinators, social services professionals and others. However, developing healthcare teams is time- and resource-intensive. Rural healthcare organizations in particular may not have staff member availability, expertise in implementing new models of care, and financial resources to build healthcare teams. Therefore, CMS should provide technical assistance and funding for team-building. Some healthcare team members may not be local, so rural tele-conferencing systems must support team conferencing. Finally, as suggested by the Committee, the payment system should increasingly reward team-based care rather than individual provider care.
- Primary care research should not focus exclusively on clinical issues. Additionally, CMS (and other federal agencies) should support health services research, such as how best to build and financially support (through payment systems) team-based care and implementation science.

- Community organization engagement is central to primary care success. CMS should align the primary care initiative with its work to advance health equity. This alignment would include addressing social determinants of health through actions such as social needs screening and referral measurement followed by intervention.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith J. Mueller".

Keith J. Mueller, Ph.D.  
Chair, RURPI Health Panel