

## **Rural Health Initiative – Overview**

### **What is the Rural Health Initiative?**

The REACH Healthcare Foundation has invited leaders in three rural counties to partner with the foundation on a new initiative to significantly increase access and quality of health services in rural communities for uninsured and underserved children and adults.

### **What counties are involved?**

REACH has invited leaders from Cass and Lafayette counties in Missouri, and Allen County, Kansas, all within the foundation's geographic service area. These three counties have significant rural populations and a relatively limited number of nonprofit organizations with which the Foundation can partner to meet the health and human service needs in their communities.

### **What is the opportunity?**

The opportunity is for community leaders and organizations working in health, human services, education, economic development, government and other fields to work together to identify new strategies that offer the potential to dramatically improve health services in their counties.

### **When does the initiative begin?**

To launch the process, the foundation sponsored leadership teams from Allen, Cass and Lafayette counties to attend the National Rural Health Association Summit in April 2012. There, local leaders had an opportunity to learn from other rural communities across the country about initiatives and strategies that are working in their area. They also began to establish a network and develop relationships with other colleagues concerned about community health.

At this stage, the REACH Foundation is asking county leaders to organize planning teams that will work together over the next eight to 10 months to identify proposals and innovations that offer the potential to substantially improve health care.

REACH will provide each county a support grant to assist with planning needs, consultants and other expenses. In addition, the foundation will provide opportunities for county teams to meet with and learn from their peers in the other participating counties, as well as from regional and national rural health program leaders and experts in community change.

### **What are the next steps for each county?**

Each county is currently building a planning team that includes a cross-section of community members. These teams are being asked to:

- Develop a process for identifying their county's health issues and concerns, and gather input and ideas for strengthening health services.
- Commit to learning and sharing with residents in their communities and with members of the other county teams participating in the initiative.
- Think beyond "good enough" and single solutions in identifying strategies and opportunities.
- Look for ways to connect programs, initiatives and interests so that there is greater impact from everyone's efforts.
- During the course of the planning period, identify a few high-impact strategies and evidence to back those ideas, and outline a work plan for implementation.

### **What happens after this planning process?**

The second phase of the initiative will begin in 2013, focusing on implementation of strategies and innovations.

Program officers from the REACH Foundation will work closely with county teams to assess the proposals and the county's funding needs. Based on proposed work plans, the foundation will determine an appropriate level of funding to support strategies that align with the foundation's funding priorities.

### **Who is the contact for more information?**

For more information about the Rural Health Initiative, contact **William Moore**, Vice President of Programs, Policy and Evaluation at the REACH Healthcare Foundation, (913) 432-4196, or email [bill@reachhealth.org](mailto:bill@reachhealth.org).

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