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March 31, 2025

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NRHA announces 2025 Rural Health Award recipients

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is proud to announce the association's 2025 Rural Health Award recipients. NRHA's Rural Health Awards are given each year to individuals and organizations in the field of rural health who have dedicated their time and talents to improving the health and well-being of others. The winners will be honored during NRHA's 48th Annual Rural Health Conference May 20-23 in Atlanta.

"We're extremely proud of this year's winners, who showcase the resilience and innovation of rural health care providers and communities," says NRHA CEO Alan Morgan. "They have each made tremendous strides to advance rural health care, and we're confident they will continue to help improve the lives of rural Americans."

Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance is this year's Outstanding Rural Health Organization. Located in Tappahannock, Va., BRTA's approach revolves around a network of 13 member organizations and more than 40 community partners that have been collaborating for more than 20 years. Their combined resources and knowledge enable BRTA to address health care challenges in rural Virginia, including mental health care, substance use disorder treatment, mobile integrated health care, and more.

Food as Medicine is this year's Outstanding Rural Health Program. Located at Summit Pacific Medical Center in Elma, Wash., this unique initiative addresses food insecurity among the most vulnerable residents in Grays Harbor County. Eligible participants receive access to a registered dietitian, a nutrition assessment, and weekly subscription boxes containing five healthy meals and recipe cards, as well as access to monthly on-site cooking classes.

Joanie Perkins has been awarded the Louis Gorin Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Health Care. Perkins has a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience that has been a huge benefit to rural health clinics in Mississippi and other rural states. She has helped to establish more than 150 rural health clinics in the nation and has participated in management and support of many of them, and she is a vocal rural health advocate both locally and nationally.

Amanda Achterman, DO, MPH, is NRHA's Rural Health Practitioner of the Year. A primary care physician at Summit Pacific Medical Center in Elma, Wash., Achterman is one of fewer than 20 family medicine providers, fewer than two fluent Spanish-speaking providers, and fewer than four obstetrics providers for more 70,000 residents in Grays Harbor County. She goes above

and beyond for her patients, and her leadership has also enhanced faculty development and improved quality of prenatal care.

David Schmitz, MD, is NRHA's Outstanding Educator Award winner. As the Dr. Verrill & Ruth Fischer professor and chair at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences Department of Family and Community Medicine, Schmitz has piloted multiple programs geared toward fostering rural health experience and advocacy in students. He also serves on the leadership team for family medicine residencies in North Dakota, helping ensure the sustainability of rural health care in the state.

Peiyin Hung, PhD, is NRHA's Outstanding Researcher Award winner. In her role as associate professor at the University of South Carolina (USC) and Co-Director of the USC Rural Health Research Center, Hung has gained a national reputation for her expertise in rural and maternal health research. Her studies in rural maternal health and birth outcomes disparities have helped in the development of national policies and action plans, and she specializes in policies that affect perinatal care access, quality, and outcomes.

Jayci Avery, MD, is the winner of the inaugural Quinn NRHA Student Award. Currently completing her family medicine residency at the University of Alabama Birmingham School of Medicine, Avery grew up in medically underserved Haleyville, Ala., and has distinguished herself at UAB as a model resident physician and enthusiastic leader who encourages other students to pursue rural practice. She will soon practice medicine in Moulton, Alabama, near her hometown.

Bradley Firchow is the winner of the inaugural Quinn NRHA Student Award. He is currently a medical student at the University of Kentucky Rural Physician Leadership Program and serves as president of NRHA's Student Constituency Group. As a student, he has been recognized as an exceptional leader, advocate, and innovator. He helped establish a new clinic in Eastern Kentucky in response to the dire need for accessible health care in rural Appalachia, and his research has been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Marcia K. Brand, PhD, is NRHA's Volunteer of the Year. A nationally known advisor on rural and oral health care, Brand has held leadership positions with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and led programs to fill in the gaps for people who live outside the economic and medical mainstream. She currently serves as cochair of the National Rural Health Foundation, is an active member of NRHA's oral health interest group, serves on the Annual Conference Planning Committee, and has spoken at numerous NRHA events.

Michelle M. Rathman is the recipient of this year's President's Award. Selected by NRHA President Michelle Mills, Rathman is a long-time NRHA member who serves on the Rural Health Policy Congress. She founded Impact! Communications Inc. in 1989 and assists rural hospitals in gaining public support for capital improvement projects, strategic planning, board education, and much more. "Michelle's work and ethics are admired," Mills says. "She is an amazing person with a caring heart, and it is truly my honor to provide her with this more than well-deserved award."

About NRHA

www.RuralHealth.US

NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research. NRHA's membership consists of a wide variety of individuals and organizations that share the common bond of an interest in rural health.