

# Rural Health Advisory Committee

**Daron Gersch, M.D., Chair**

Albany Medical Center  
310 Golf View Drive  
Albany, MN 56307

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Honorable Kurt Daudt  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
463 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Thomas M. Bakk  
Minnesota Senate  
226 Capitol  
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606

Dear Majority Leader Bakk and Speaker Daudt:

RE: Rural Health Care Workforce Needs

The Rural Health Advisory Committee is a Governor-appointed statewide forum for rural health interests with a diverse membership. The Committee advises the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Health and other state agencies on rural health issues. Our membership includes House and Senate members of each party.


A top priority of the Rural Health Advisory Committee is to support the rural health care workforce. Our members understand that health care in rural areas is challenged by the uneven distribution and relative shortage of medical care providers. Rural communities struggle to recruit and retain an adequate supply of health care professionals. The rural family medicine workforce, in particular, is aging, with fewer primary care providers willing to fill these gaps. While the Affordable Care Act increased access to health care and insurance coverage for consumers, it also increased the demand on rural primary care systems.

The Rural Health Advisory Committee has closely followed the task forces and commissions addressing health workforce issues over the last year – the Legislative Health Care Workforce Commission, the Foreign Trained Physician Task Force and others. We are pleased that rural-specific issues and concerns are included in the discussions. Our members are especially interested in the Mental Health Workforce Summit; these issues are a top concern for rural communities and health care providers. Efforts to provide an adequate supply of primary care physicians and practitioners are also crucial to maintaining the rural health care system in Minnesota.

The Rural Health Advisory Committee is also concerned about nursing homes' inability to retain staff because of pay differences with hospitals and with non-health care jobs. Committee members often learn of rural nursing home that can't admit local patients because they cannot get enough staff to safely care for the people there. As the population ages this is only going to become a bigger problem if we don't do something now.

The Rural Health Advisory Committee encourages you and your colleagues to review the work of these projects and create a clear path to ensure an adequate supply of rural health care providers. Our members are willing to provide feedback on final recommendations, especially those most likely to impact rural areas. We wish you a productive legislative session on these and other rural issues, and look forward to being of help where we can.

Sincerely,



Daron Gersch, MD, Chair  
Minnesota Rural Health Advisory Committee

#### **Rural Health Advisory Committee Members**

Daron Gersch, MD • John Baerg • Ray Christensen, MD • Thomas Crowley • Ellen Delatorre  
Rep. Clark Johnson • Margaret Kalina, R.N. • Sen. Tony Lourey • Jackie Osterhaus, P.A. Sen. Julie Rosen  
Rep. Joe Schomacker • Millicent Simenson, L.P.N. • Nancy Stratman • Thomas Vanderwal