

NEW POLICY BRIEF: COVID-19 and an Aging Rural Population

Policy Recommendations to Improve Health Disparities for Older Rural Adults

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Improving quality of life for the aging rural population requires a focus on digital literacy, integrated services and social connection, says [a new policy brief](#) released by Rural Health Summit organizers, [Southern Illinois University \(SIU\) Medicine Department of Population Science and Policy](#), [SIU Paul Simon Public Policy Institute](#), [The University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health](#) and the [SIU Medicine Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development](#).



The Rural Health Summit group recommends the following actions to improve health and quality of life for older rural residents:

- **Utilize technology to enhance the capacity and digital literacy of rural communities to better treat chronic conditions through telehealth and telemonitoring.**
- **Invest research and program funds in designing rural-specific models for the aging population that align sectors to provide integrated, personalized and comprehensive services.**
- **Address social isolation among the rural elderly populations by implementing social isolation screenings and community-based programs.**

The Rural Health Summit will host a webinar on April 22 to discuss the issues faced by aging rural residents. **Register for that webinar [HERE](#) and see the [schedule of upcoming webinars](#).**

“These policy recommendations aim to address both the preexisting conditions and acute challenges caused by COVID-19 for our aging rural population,” said Dr. Sameer Vohra, Chair, SIU Medicine Department of Population Science and Policy. “Conversations with statewide experts uncovered a great need but also a huge capacity and drive for innovation in our rural communities. We hope leaders from across the state will collaborate to help close health disparities faced by older rural residents.”

The policy recommendations are the result of discussions from rural health stakeholders, community leaders, legislators, physicians and experts from organizations from throughout Illinois and build on the Rural Health Summit’s initial report, “[Building a Healthier Rural Illinois: Understanding and Addressing the Challenges of COVID-19](#).”

The Rural Health Summit will release monthly topic-specific policy briefs and host corresponding webinars through January 2022 on topics of mental health, public health systems, nutrition and fitness, children’s growth and development, workforce development, opioids, health and housing and economic development. Additionally, the Department of Population Science and Policy is presenting the **21st Annual SIH/SIU Health Policy Institute – The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact of Health Policy: A Renewed Focus on Healthy and Equitable Communities** on June 8, 2021. Register for that virtual event [here](#).
