

## LEGISLATIVE BILL 994

Approved by the Governor April 7, 1990

Introduced by Schellpeper, 18; Dierks, 40; Coordsen, 32; Haberman, 44

AN ACT relating to health care; to state intent; to create the Office of Rural Health within the Department of Health and to provide powers and duties for such office; and to provide duties for the Commission on Rural Health Manpower.  
Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. The Legislature finds and recognizes that rural health care is in the process of transition. Many rural communities are finding it difficult to recruit and retain health care professionals, to keep hospitals open, and to provide quality care to their residents. Although recent national rankings show that Nebraskans are among the healthiest in the nation, continued stress on our rural health care system could leave areas of the state without adequate health care services.

The Legislature further finds that rural health care issues will be best addressed through a comprehensive approach that emphasizes two principles. First, rural health care problems are seldom isolated in their causes or effects. Second, rural health care problems are most effectively resolved by residents of the area involved and state strategies should focus on assisting those residents to develop and implement their own solutions to such problems.

Sec. 2. The Office of Rural Health is hereby created within the Department of Health. The office shall have the following powers and duties:

(1) To assist rural residents in obtaining high quality health care which includes the following:

(a) Assist in the recruitment and retention of health care professionals to rural areas, including specifically, physicians and nurses;

(b) Assist rural communities in maintaining the viability of hospital services whenever feasible or, for communities in transition, in developing alternative systems to provide equivalent quality care to their residents;

(c) Assist rural communities in planning to meet changes needed due to the changing rural economy

and demographics or new technology;

(d) Assist in the development of health care networks or cooperative ventures among rural communities or health care providers;

(e) Assist in promoting or developing demonstration projects to identify and establish alternative health care systems; and

(f) Assist rural communities in developing and identifying leaders and leadership skills among their residents to enable such communities to work toward appropriate and cost-effective solutions to the health care issues that confront them;

(2) To develop a comprehensive rural health policy to serve as a guide for the development of programs of the department aimed at improving health care in rural Nebraska and a rural health action plan to guide implementation of the policy;

(3) To establish liaison with other state agency efforts in the area of rural development and human service delivery to ensure that the programs of the office are appropriately coordinated with these efforts and to encourage use of the comprehensive rural health policy by other agencies as a guide to their plans and programs affecting rural health;

(4) To develop and maintain an appropriate data system to identify present and potential rural health issues and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and demonstration projects;

(5) To encourage and facilitate increased public awareness of issues affecting rural health care; and

(6) To carry out related duties as directed by the Director of Health.

Sec. 3. The rural health policy and the rural health action plan developed by the Office of Rural Health shall be developed in consultation with the Commission on Rural Health Manpower.

Sec. 4. The Legislature shall appropriate sufficient funds to the Department of Health to enable the Office of Rural Health to carry out its duties pursuant to sections 2 and 3 of this act.