



Rural Centered  
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A Monthly Newsletter from the  
Colorado Center for Rural Education



*Students study bacteria during an interactive exercise at the 2023 Rural Public Health Summit*

## Workforce Pathways, Networking, and Scholarship Push Rural Services Forward

The Rural Public Health, Education, and Healthcare Initiative (RPHEHI) began as a partnership between the [Colorado School of Public Health](#) at the University of Northern Colorado and the [Colorado Center for Rural Education](#). The Colorado School of Public Health is an accredited, collaborative school of public health representing three Colorado public educational and research institutions: the University of Colorado, Colorado State University, and the University of Northern Colorado.

RPHEHI has grown into a group of professionals that facilitates and develops collaborations and partnerships to meet the health and education needs of Colorado's rural communities. RPHEHI's vision is that dedicated and expert public health, education, and healthcare professionals serve every Colorado rural community.

The group is working to achieve that vision by way of four main priorities:

1. Expansion of rural public health, education, and healthcare workforce **pathway programs**, including development of future professionals from high school and college candidates who commit to work in rural communities.
2. Cultivation of a rural public health, education, and healthcare **leadership program** that
3. prepares interested professionals for expanded roles through participation in college and university programs.
4. Development of a coordinated rural public health, education, and healthcare **professional development network**.
5. Cultivation of **advocacy and scholarship** that is focused on rural public health, education, and healthcare.

## Reaching Out - Rural Youth Public Health Summit

One way the Initiative is working to expand workforce pathway programs is by hosting a Rural Youth Public Health Summit. The first one was held in the fall of 2023 on the UNC campus in Greeley. Speakers introduced 22 rural high school students to public health issues by way of short lectures followed by interactive, hands-on workshops. In one particularly impactful workshop, students progressed through a series of exercises, donning thick gloves, goggles, and other equipment to simulate a person's journey through dementia.

"We hope to make the Summit a mobile concept and take it on the road to our rural communities," said Teresa Sharp, former co-chair of the RPHEHI and Emeritus Associate Professor at the Colorado School of Public Health at UNC. "We can make a greater impact on more students if we can take the program to them." The goal is to get more students interested in pursuing a career in public health.



*UNC Master of Public Health student Zoey Xian helps a student prepare for the Virtual Dementia Tour at the 2023 Rural Public Health Summit*

## Building and Sharing Models

“Our group members identify common needs,” said Bob Daugherty, co-founder of the RPHEHI and retired Dean of the Nevada University School of Medicine, “and then start to figure out how we can work together to meet those needs.” One such example is the urgent need for behavioral health professionals across the education system, public health, and the healthcare system. If the RPHEHI can build a model that works for cost-sharing across agencies, rural communities could fund a behavioral health position that would otherwise not exist.

The RPHEHI also finds ways to share knowledge with multiple agencies. A student earning a master’s degree in public health at UNC collaborated with rural farmers and ranchers while completing his practicum. He worked with the local [Area Health Education Center](#) to expand a peer-assisted network for adults to help prevent suicide among this very at-risk group. After that, he realized that the young people were at risk as well. So, he developed a curriculum for a peer-assisted youth group, which is now available to all Area Health Education Centers and other agencies.

In another example, Craig Jonas, PhD, Founder and CEO for [CoPeace PBC](#) is helping [InReach Community Dx](#) leverage the existing, underutilized infrastructure, staffing, and technologies in rural hospital laboratories to create sustainable revenue. The program not only creates revenue that supports the hospitals’ larger role in the community, it also expands the available services in the community and improves the quality of care.



*Professor Lisa Caldwell of UNC’s Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Dietetics Department helps students understand public health issues at the 2023 Rural Public Health Summit*

## Writing Grants

Yet another way RPHEHI makes an impact is by working together to apply for grant funding that will help rural communities. Group members working for the [Colorado School of Public Health](#) at UNC partnered with [UNC's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders](#) at UNC to write a grant to support speech therapy services for rural Colorado communities.

Another group member received funding from the [Colorado Trust](#) that the RPHEHI used to transport the students from their hometowns to Greeley for the first Rural Youth Public Health Summit.

RPHEHI member Dr. Caitlin Raaz and co-chair Dr. Dannon Cox were recently awarded a USDA grant to pilot online early childhood language development training/education modules for community health workers and parents of young children in rural areas. Specifically, the pilot program will develop English and Spanish videos and training information to assist community health workers working with families with young children.



*Wendy Abbott, left, who is a Compassionate Care Training Specialist at Centennial Area Health Education Center, and UNC Professor Lisa Caldwell collaborate at the 2023 Rural Public Health Summit*

# Moving Forward

The RPHEHI is soliciting input from all rural Colorado communities:

- What are your greatest needs?
- Do you have ideas for cost-sharing models to meet those needs, or do you have a model in place that is working?
- Are there any professionals in your community, such as school counselors, who want to receive training and expand their roles in public health?
- Would you be interested in having a mobile Rural Youth Summit visit your community?

“We are an active group with an interest in outreach,” said Daugherty. “We want to hear from the people on the ground what they need.”

To send feedback, inquiries, or requests to the RPHEHI, email RPHEHI co-chair at [Robert.Fulton@unco.edu](mailto:Robert.Fulton@unco.edu).

## Upcoming Application Timelines

**Colorado Rural Student Teaching Stipend** applications for fall 2024 accepted: December 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024

**National Board Certified Teacher Stipend** applications for 2024 accepted: January 1, 2024, through April 30, 2024

**Rural Inservice Educator Stipend** applications for fall 2024 accepted: May 1, 2024, through August 31, 2024

**Colorado Rural Student Teaching Stipend** applications for spring 2025 accepted: July 1, 2024, through October 31, 2024

**Colorado Substitute Stipend** applications accepted: Ongoing

Visit TEACH Colorado’s **Financial Aid and Scholarship Information** page for information about additional scholarships.

For financial aid available to in-service and aspiring educators, download the **Colorado Department of Education’s Educator Recruitment and District Supports flyer**.

# Your Paraprofessionals Are Invited

The Center hosts a virtual open house every Tuesday afternoon from 3:00 to 4:30, where we help paraprofessionals navigate higher education and teacher preparation programs. We have guided hundreds of paraprofessionals through the process of figuring out how to afford and complete their college degrees.

For more information, email [Robert.Fulton@unco.edu](mailto:Robert.Fulton@unco.edu).

## Featured Partners

Learn more about our [featured partners](#) and how they are helping to solve the teacher shortage in rural Colorado. To have your organization added as a featured partner, please email [Robert.Fulton@unco.edu](mailto:Robert.Fulton@unco.edu).

This month, we'd like to highlight Western Colorado University's 100% online [teacher preparation program](#), which allows adults to complete their degrees and obtain a teaching license. The program is entirely online and allows individuals to maintain their existing employment while attending classes.

Robert Fulton, PhD | Director

