# Change Ideas to Grow, Nurture, and Lift (CIGNAL)

## *For Maternal and Child Health in Rural Communities*

Following the successful execution of the Change Ideas to Grow, Nurture, and Lift (CIGNAL) for Maternal Mortality and Morbidity and CIGNAL for Perinatal Mental and Behavioral Health, the Healthy Start TA & Support Center (TASC) launched a third CIGNAL project focused on Maternal and Child Health (MCH) in Rural Communities. CIGNAL for MCH in Rural Communities aimed to enhance and strengthen the capacity of Healthy Start (HS) grantees to identify and execute strategies to improve and make MCH services in rural communities more equitable.

First, the TASC hosted a two-hour expert meeting with seven subject matter experts in the field of rural health care. The experts worked to identify and explore potential change ideas related to MCH for rural communities - specifically challenges that impact MCH outcomes, including the impacts of COVID-19 on service delivery. Throughout the discussion, the experts explored the distinctions between rural and urban communities and the intersectionality between the populations served.

The TASC then hosted a webinar for grantees, which discussed the key issues and strategies around providing MCH services in rural communities, highlighted stories from HS grantees serving rural communities, and provided participants with resources and tools for testing the strategies in their own communities.

## Challenges Around MCH in Rural Communities identified by CIGNAL experts

1. **Lack of transportation** and enduring long driving distances to receive health care
2. **Few health care providers** as a result of limited recruitment and retention in rural areas (i.e., health care deserts)
3. **Lack of access** to prenatal and maternal care due to **obstetric (OB) unit closures in hospitals**
4. **Low quality healthcare due to an inequitable system** (e.g., limited health insurance coverage, limited or lack of access to basic health care services)
5. **Lack of co-located services** (i.e., health care services being in one place) and **limited access to mental and behavioral health services**
6. **Erosion of trust and connectedness** between health care providers and community members
7. **Pandemic exacerbated existing issues** (e.g., those on the margins of care fell off)
8. **Telehealth is still limited** and not accessible to everyone who needs it

## Challenges Around MCH in Rural Communities identified by Healthy Start grantees

1. **Lack of continuity of care** for community members
2. **Lack of transportation**
3. **Limited access to basic healthcare**
4. **Decreased participation in the HS program** by consumers due to the COVID-19 pandemic
5. **Limited availability of mental and behavioral health providers**

## Expert-identified Strategies for Addressing MCH Challenges in Rural Communities

1. **Rebuild trust and connectedness** between community members and health care professionals
2. **Encourage community engagement** in which stakeholders become trusted decision makers
3. **Revise** how programs are structured and **ensure they are relevant to what the communities need**
4. **Work with organizations** that have gained the community's trust to **build bridges to larger, well-funded organizations**
5. **Provide culturally competent/congruent care** without duplicating services. This is defined as care that respects the diversity in the patient population and cultural factors that can affect health and health care (e.g., language, communication styles, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors)
6. **Advocate for sustainability to be embedded in programs** that are implemented in rural communities

## Grantee-identified Strategies for Addressing MCH Challenges in Rural Communities

1. **Develop and distribute** resources with information that **connects community members to care**
2. **Document** HS consumer information in REDCap (or similar database) to **enable automatic referrals for high-risk moms to care providers**
3. **Partner with mobile clinics** to make health care more accessible
4. **Collaborate** with insurance navigators to **help HS consumers access and utilize insurance coverage**

## Case Studies: Healthy Start Projects That Are Actively Addressing MCH Challenges in Rural Communities

### *Indiana Rural Health Association's Healthy Start Communities that C.A.R.E (HSCC) (Indiana)*
*Access to Mental and Behavioral Health Services for Rural Communities*

**Background**
- HSCC was established to combat high infant mortality rates in rural Indiana
- Provides confidential screening, support, referrals, treatment and education for expectant mothers, infants and families
- Places trained Perinatal Navigators to work one-on-one with residents in Daviess, Dubois, Green, and Martin counties
- Identified barriers that community members face in obtaining mental health treatment, including: transportation, insurance coverage, cultural and language barriers, immigration status, internet access, limited resources

**Methodology**
- Identify individuals who need mental health care when completing the Healthy Start data collection forms with clients.
- If a mental health issue is indicated, immediately refer them to an internal Licensed Social Worker/Licensed Clinical Social Worker through an automated system

**Key Takeaways**
- Successful strategies for combatting barriers to access include:
  - Utilizing the Community Action Network (CAN) to connect consumers with community-based resources
  - Using systems such as Indiana Rural Health Association (IRHA) Help:
    - A collaborative tool that connects users with direct social services for free or at a reduced cost
    - Eases the referral process
    - Assists users in requesting and scheduling appointments
    - Available in more than 100 languages
  - Partnering with community organizations and/or groups such as:
    - Language Line Solutions
    - Indiana Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative (IPQIC)

# Case Studies continued: Healthy Start Projects That Are Actively Addressing MCH Challenges in Rural Communities

## Missouri Bootheel Regional Consortium Inc. (MBRC) (Missouri):
### Understanding COVID Vaccine Hesitancy Among Pregnant and Postnatal Women

### Background
- MBRC is a not-for-profit community-based organization in the southeast corner of Missouri serving Dunklin, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, and Scott counties
- Core programs provide outreach, education, training, targeted intervention, community events, and community mobilization services for mothers, fathers, children, and families
- MBRC observed COVID vaccine hesitancy among pregnant women in the Bootheel counties and sought to better understand the factors contributing to it

### Methodology:
- Conducted a voluntary focus group with eight women
- Provided reimbursement for transportation and childcare to support attendance. Also provided gift cards as incentives.
- Utilized a hybrid approach (i.e., moderator was virtual and participants were on-site)

### Results:
- One out of eight participants reported that they received detailed information regarding the virus and vaccine from their obstetrician's (OB) office, including how it worked and its impact on the baby. This participant was White.
- The remaining participants reported that their OB provided superficial information about the virus and vaccine. They reported being told:
  - "Everyone [will] get it eventually"
  - "Take the vaccine when you can"
  - "It [is] best for [you] and best for the baby"

### Observations and Findings:
- Mistrust plays a pivotal role in vaccine hesitancy
- Participants reported that social media outlets were a key source from which they received information about the vaccine
- Based on an analysis of the data collected, racial disparities in the information provided about the vaccine were observed

### Key Takeaways:
- Strategies that foster trust between the patient and provider, and trust in the vaccine, are crucial to improving vaccine acceptance rates
- MBRC is working forcefully to make an impact on vaccine hesitancy in their rural areas through outreach and education about COVID-19
- MBRC engages community health workers (CHWs), in addition to local health departments and pharmacies,

# Potential Resources & Partnerships

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Rural Health Resources**

- Rural Crosswalk: CMS Flexibilities to Fight COVID-19 - Highlights COVID-19 related provisions that CMS has issued by regulation or waiver that impact Rural Health Clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Critical Access Hospitals, Rural Acute Care PPS Hospitals, and/or Skilled Nursing Facilities, and describes the signifance for these rural providers.

- Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) Center - Serves as a hub for information related to RHCs, including payment and billing policis and fact sheets, educational resources, and policy regulations.

- Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) Center - The CMS FQHC Center serves as a hub for information related to FQHCs, including paymernt and billing policies, past training opportunities, policy regulations, and preventive service fact sheets.

- Quality Payment Program (QPP) - CMS provides flexible options to help clinicians in small practices actively participate in the QPP. For more information, view the QPP Support for Small and Rural Practices Fact Sheet (PDF) and the QPP Technical Assistance Resource Guide.

- CMS Innovation Center - CMSs Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation (the Innovation Center) supports the development and testing of innovative health care payment and service delivery models. This includes several models relevant to rural commuties.

**Federal Communications Commission Rural Care Program** – provides funding to eligible health care providers for telecommunications and broadband services necessary for the provision of health care.

**Greater Plains Telehealth Resource and Assistance Center Health IT Telehealth Start-up and Resource Guide** – provides an overview and framework for implementing telehealth in critical access hospitals and rural areas

**Guide for Rural Health Care Collaboration and Coordination (2019)** – Describes how rural hospitals, community health centers, local public health departments, and other rural stakeholders can work together to assess and address their rural communities' health needs

**HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy Resource Guide for New Applicants and Grantees** – Provides new applicants and grantees with an array of relevant resources, tools, and services to assist in the implementation and sustainability of rural health projects

**Rural Health Information Hub (RHIhub)** – Offers a library of resources, coverage of rural issues, state guides, toolkits, program models and more

**Rural Community Health Gateway** – Guidance on building effective community health programs and improve services

# Potential Resources & Partnerships (continued)

**Rural Health Research Gateway** - Provides access to research from all 10 federally-funded Rural Health Research Centers and Policy Analysis Initiatives

- **Rural Health Research Recaps** – provides access to brief summaries on key rural health issues
- **Research Alerts** – receive email notifications when new research products are completed
- **Research Publications** – provides access to policy briefs, chartbooks, journal articles, and other products developed under the Centers' research projects
- **Research Centers** – provides information about the Rural Health Research Centers Program
- **Dissemination Toolkit** – provides education on how to create health research products and tips for developing policy briefs, fact sheets, journal articles and more

**UNC: The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research**

- NC Rural Health Research Program – Seeks to address problems in rural health care delivery through basic research, policy-relevant analyses, geographic and graphical presentation of data, and the dissemination of information to organizations and individuals

# Healthy Start TA & Support Center Resources

- **Request 1:1 technical assistance** with Quality Improvement Advisor, Jane Taylor, to help your HS project further develop and test change idea strategies. To request TA, visit the EPIC website, click the "HS EPIC Center Tab" and select "Request Technical Assistance."

- **Connect with the Healthy Start TA & Support Center** at healthystart@nichq.org