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NACo grants rural health technical assistance awards

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Counties (NACo) today granted technical assistance awards to three rural counties to help them assess and revitalize their local health care delivery systems.

The three technical assistance recipients are Franklin County, Fla., Pacific County, Wash., and Refugio County, Texas. These counties, selected through a competitive and comprehensive review process, will work with NACo and consultants from the National Center for Rural Health Works throughout 2011 to:

- identify local health care needs and factors affecting the local delivery of health care;
- assess the economic impact of the local health care sector and determine how the health care system can better meet community needs; and
- strengthen relationships with community partners to improve local health care delivery.

The technical assistance includes two community meetings for each selected county facilitated by the National Center for Rural Health Works consultants, as well as analysis of local health indicator data and community surveying.

“America’s health care systems serving rural communities are facing enormous challenges to provide adequate care,” said NACo President Glen Whitley, county judge, Tarrant County, Texas. “Counties believe that access to quality health care is critical to the physical and mental well being of their residents. The technical assistance will help these counties strengthen their health care systems.”

The technical assistance being offered to the selected counties is especially important in light of the Affordable Care Act’s requirement that nonprofit hospitals conduct periodic community health needs assessments to demonstrate they are taking on uncompensated care in their communities.

“County involvement in community health needs assessments is very important to help ensure that the health care safety net burden is shared among local providers,” Whitley said.

County governments play an essential role in America’s healthcare system. They are unique in their responsibility to both finance and deliver health services through public hospitals and clinics, local health departments, and long-term care facilities. In addition, counties provide mental health and substance
abuse treatment and offer coverage programs for the uninsured.

The technical assistance is funded through the Office of Rural Health Policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information on this program, visit www.naco.org/ruralhealth or contact Anita Cardwell at 202-942-4267 or acardwell@naco.org.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.