

Health Care in Rural America

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Foreword

Federal policies to advance the Nation's health have often included provisions to mitigate the special problems in delivering health care in rural areas. Recently, however, these policies have received renewed scrutiny in the face of reported increases in rural hospital closures, ongoing problems in recruiting and retaining health personnel, and difficulty in providing medical technologies commonly available in urban areas. Mounting concerns related to rural residents' access to health care prompted the Senate Rural Health Caucus to request that OTA conduct an assessment of these and related issues. This report, *Health Care in Rural America*, is the final product of that assessment. (Two other OTA papers, *Rural Emergency Medical Services* and *Defining "Rural" Areas: Impact on Health Care Policy and Research*, have previously been published in connection with this assessment.)

An advisory panel, chaired by Dr. James Bernstein of the North Carolina Office of Rural Health and Resource Development, provided guidance and assistance during the assessment. Also, three public meetings were held (in Scottsdale, Arizona; Bismarck, North Dakota; and Meridian, Mississippi) to provide OTA with the opportunity to discuss specific rural health topics with local and regional health practitioners, administrators, and officials. Site visits to local facilities were conducted in association with these activities. A number of individuals from both government and the private sector provided information and reviewed drafts of the report.

OTA gratefully acknowledges the contribution of each of these individuals. As with all OTA reports, the content of the assessment is the sole responsibility of OTA and does not necessarily constitute the consensus or endorsement of the advisory panel or the Technology Assessment Board. Key staff responsible for the assessment were Elaine Power, Lawrence Miike, Maria Hewitt, Tim Henderson, Leah Wolfe, Marc Zimmerman, and Rita Hughes.



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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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¹From May 1989.

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