UNDERSTANDING THE RURAL PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

**RURAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SERVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**

- Promote health and health promotion programs
- Provide critical care in communities they serve, often the only providers of health care in their area
- Have less funding, fewer staff and less training

**WHO ARE THEY?**

- 83% identify as women
- 43% age 31-50
- 75% identify as white
- 22% have an advanced degree
- 56% have worked in public health for 5+ years

**AT A TIME WHEN RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE BECOMING MORE DIVERSE, RURAL HEALTH DEPT STAFF REPORTED SKILL GAPS AND NEED IN TRAINING IN DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING, MAKING JUSTICE EQUITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (JEDI)**

- Lack of proficiency in these skills, which were crucial during pandemic response, may have contributed to staff stress and burnout (Rural Health, Community, and Public Health: Experiences from a local health department, February 2020).

**CHALLENGES FOR RURAL PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF**

- 22% experienced bullying and harassment from those outside their health department during COVID-19 response
- Despite experiencing more harassment, 19% of rural staff reported an intent to leave their organization vs. 25% of urban staff
- 17% of rural staff said the COVID-19 response made them want to leave their organization in the next year

**PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND DECISION MAKERS SHOULD:**

- Learn from rural staff about how to connect effectively with populations that may have a negative view of public health
- Develop targeted trainings that highlight the importance of community relationships in data use and communication efforts for rural health departments
- Build a strong foundation in cross-sectoral partnerships, systems and strategic thinking, and community engagement
- Highlight examples of effective rural cross-sector partnerships in support of community-level health promotion and disease prevention initiatives
- Allocate resources to address skill gaps in data-based decision making and JEDI
- Support growth of a more diverse workforce to enable rural staff to effectively serve their increasingly diverse communities