



NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Contact: Susan Kirkwood
703/519-7910

www.NRHArural.org

February 5, 2003

RURAL WORKFORCE CRISIS NOT ADDRESSED BY WHITE HOUSE BUDGET

(Washington, D.C.) — The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) today announced its concern with President George W. Bush's newly released Fiscal Year 2004 budget, which fails to address rural healthcare workforce shortages in rural America.

The President's budget includes severe cuts to the Health Professions programs, which prepare health professionals to serve rural and other underserved communities. The FY 2004 budget also eliminates the Community Access Program, which helps many providers in rural areas to integrate networks of health care providers. Additionally, the budget significantly reduces funding for State Offices of Rural Health, which provide a focal point for rural health activities in the states.

"I am dismayed and disappointed with the President's failure to recognize our country's health care workforce shortage within the budget," NRHA President Wayne Myers, MD said. "Although we understand that money is tighter this year, it does not justify a budget which will have such a tremendous negative impact on the health and well-being of so many Americans."

A combination of sky-rocketing health care costs, increased malpractice insurance premiums and a national shortage of health care professionals have left millions of rural Americans without adequate access to health care. As a result, rural communities are faced with higher death rates for unintentional injuries and motor-vehicle injuries, higher suicide rates and fewer dental visits than their urban counterparts.

"Health services in rural America are being hit from all sides by the budget cuts," Myers said. "The lack of sufficient federal funding to vital programs denies rural Americans the equitable health coverage they are entitled to. The NRHA urges the administration and Congress to consider the serious implications these cuts have on rural communities."

The NRHA is a national nonprofit membership organization that provides leadership on rural health issues. The association's mission is to improve the health of rural Americans and to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research. The NRHA membership is made up of a diverse collection of individuals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health.

###