

Idaho Rural Solutions Initiative

Within little more than one generation, migration from rural to urban communities has led to a downturn in the quality of life, availability of services and diversity of employment opportunities in rural communities across Idaho, tearing holes in social structures. The University of Idaho-led Idaho Rural Solutions Initiative seeks to identify underlying issues and collaborative solutions.

Background

A leading rural community physician captured changes caused by rural-urban migration in three identifiable mechanisms of cause and effect:

- The “exporting” of poverty to rural areas has led to an increase in social dysfunction, erosion of employment opportunities and an increase in the proportion of families living in poverty.
- The loss of an agricultural base and corporatization of rural businesses has led to fewer and less diverse jobs, a loss of service infrastructure and fewer transit services, contributing to erosion of quality of life and increases in societal-based health issues such as obesity and drug abuse.
- Increasing ecological change is much more visible and tangible in rural versus urban communities, contributing to anxiety experienced by rural residents, leading to overall diminution of quality of life and general health. The loss of open space and connection to the land also has a deleterious impact on youth growing up in these areas, resulting in youth who are less rooted in the natural world, which used to be a critical element of the rural experience.



Problem-solving framework

By focusing on an underlying driver of these issues, community health, this initiative will bring together the intellectual insight of University of Idaho research faculty from many disciplines, in concert with Idaho outreach faculty who are closely connected with rural communities and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, to identify the highest priority community health needs.

Researchers also will work with community leaders and rural-based physicians in implementing interventions in selected communities in order to study approaches and solutions that work well for Idaho. Trainee physicians with the WWAMI medical education program also will be engaged in the intellectual development and conduct of the research process and in connecting with Idaho rural communities, enhancing their bonds and long-term community linkage.

Outcomes and impacts

Identification of priority rural community health issues will form a framework to assist legislators in formulating policies that determine allocation of resources for rural communities in Idaho.

Research into specific approaches that most effectively improve the quality of life in test-case Idaho rural communities can be generalized for the benefit of all Idaho rural communities.

For more information, please contact:

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