

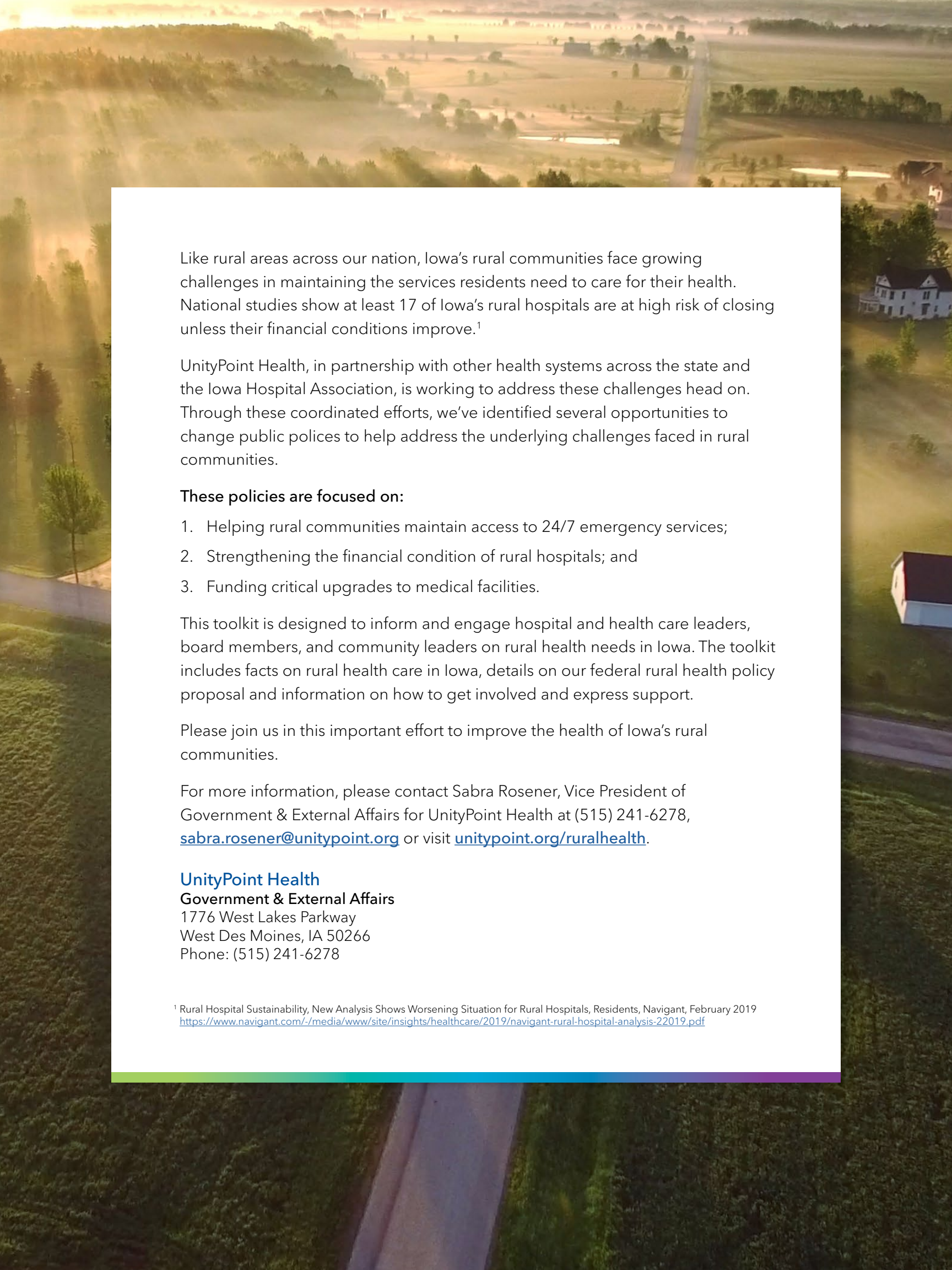
A man wearing a brown hat and a plaid shirt is walking away from the camera through a field. The field is filled with rows of crops, and there are irrigation systems visible in the background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow over the scene.

Supporting Access to Essential Health Care Services in Iowa's Rural Communities

*An Advocacy Toolkit for Hospital and Health Care
Leaders, Board Members, and Community Leaders*



UnityPoint Health



Like rural areas across our nation, Iowa's rural communities face growing challenges in maintaining the services residents need to care for their health. National studies show at least 17 of Iowa's rural hospitals are at high risk of closing unless their financial conditions improve.¹

UnityPoint Health, in partnership with other health systems across the state and the Iowa Hospital Association, is working to address these challenges head on. Through these coordinated efforts, we've identified several opportunities to change public policies to help address the underlying challenges faced in rural communities.

These policies are focused on:

1. Helping rural communities maintain access to 24/7 emergency services;
2. Strengthening the financial condition of rural hospitals; and
3. Funding critical upgrades to medical facilities.

This toolkit is designed to inform and engage hospital and health care leaders, board members, and community leaders on rural health needs in Iowa. The toolkit includes facts on rural health care in Iowa, details on our federal rural health policy proposal and information on how to get involved and express support.

Please join us in this important effort to improve the health of Iowa's rural communities.

For more information, please contact Sabra Rosener, Vice President of Government & External Affairs for UnityPoint Health at (515) 241-6278, sabra.rosener@unitypoint.org or visit unitypoint.org/ruralhealth.

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¹ Rural Hospital Sustainability, New Analysis Shows Worsening Situation for Rural Hospitals, Residents, Navigant, February 2019
<https://www.navigant.com/-/media/www/site/insights/healthcare/2019/navigant-rural-hospital-analysis-22019.pdf>

Rural Health Care in Iowa

Rural Iowans

- More than forty percent of Iowans – or 2 in 5 – live in rural communities and depend on small rural hospitals and clinics for their health care needs.²
- Rural residents tend to be older, experience higher rates of chronic illness and are more likely to be under- or uninsured.³

Iowa's Rural Hospitals and Clinics

- Iowans in rural communities are served by:⁴
 - 95 rural hospitals, 82 of which are considered Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) under a federal program aimed at reducing financial vulnerability of rural hospitals.
 - 187 Rural Health Clinics (RHCs), a federal program to increase access to primary care services in rural areas.
 - 38 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), a federal program providing community-based services in underserved areas.

Local Communities at Risk

- According to a recent national [study](#) published by Navigant Consulting, Iowa is one of 34 states with a large percentage of rural hospitals at high financial risk:⁵
 - 17 of Iowa's rural hospitals (or 18 percent) are at high risk of closing unless their financial situations improve.
 - 15 of Iowa's 17 at-risk rural hospitals are deemed essential to their communities due to trauma status, service to vulnerable populations, geographic isolation or economic impact.

Growing Financial Pressures

- Like others across the country, Iowa's rural hospitals face growing financial pressures:
 - Fewer inpatient admissions
 - More people choosing to receive care at larger facilities in other communities
 - Rising costs of labor, technology and medical supplies
 - Declining payments from programs like Medicare and Medicaid that frequently do not cover the costs of delivering care

Shortage of Health Professionals

- Ongoing shortages of physicians, nurses and other professionals make it harder and more expensive to attract a skilled workforce to remote rural communities:
 - Iowa ranks 46th nationally in the number of physicians per 100,000 patients.⁶
 - 61 of Iowa's 99 counties are designated (in whole or in part) as health professional shortage areas for primary care.⁷
 - 86 out of Iowa's 99 counties are designated health professional shortage areas for mental health.⁸

² Rural Health Information Hub, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), 2018, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/iowa>

³ About Rural Health Care, National Rural Health Association, <https://www.ruralhealthweb.org/about-nrha/about-rural-health-care>

⁴ Rural Health Information Hub, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), 2018, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/iowa>

⁵ Rural Hospital Sustainability, New Analysis Shows Worsening Situation for Rural Hospitals, Residents, Navigant, February 2019, <https://www.navigant.com/-/media/www/site/insights/healthcare/2019/navigant-rural-hospital-analysis-22019.pdf>

⁶ Physician Shortage in Iowa and Nation, KWQC, June 6, 2019, <https://www.kwqc.com/content/news/Physician-shortage-in-iowa-and-nation-510928021.html>

⁷ Physician assistant shortage looms in Iowa, The Gazette, November 17, 2018, <https://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/education/iowa-physician-assistant-shortage-20181117>

⁸ Mental health officials struggle to serve rural flood victims, Iowa City Press-Citizen, July 28, 2019, <https://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/2019/07/28/mental-health-care-shortage-evidence-flood-hit-iowa-counties/1851827001/>



FACT SHEET

Rural Health Priorities

UnityPoint Health is working with hospitals, health systems and policymakers to promote new policies to address rural health care needs. This new proposal offers a three-pronged approach to help hospitals maintain critical services in communities and provide adequate support for those essential services. The three primary aspects of the proposal are:

Priority 1: Maintain 24/7 Emergency Services in Rural Areas Through Creation of Rural Emergency Hospitals

Some rural hospitals have too few inpatient admissions to sustain their operations or qualify as a hospital under Medicare. The proposal would create a new kind of hospital under Medicare – a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) – allowing facilities to keep their doors open and maintain emergency care.

- **Services:** An REH would provide 24/7 emergency services, diagnostic testing and outpatient care.
- **Transportation:** An REH would be prepared to transfer patients quickly to larger facilities when inpatient care is needed.
- **Telehealth:** An REH could participate in various federal programs, including telehealth programs, expanding access to specialists and other providers.
- **Referrals and Support:** An REH would maintain an agreement with a larger hospital for referrals and other support.
- **Quality Standards:** An REH would be required to meet certain quality standards or face financial penalties.

Benefits for Patients and Communities

- Maintains access to essential services close to home.
- Expands access to specialty and behavioral health services through participation in telehealth.
- Protects financial sustainability of rural hospitals.
- Provides funding for critical upgrades to health care facilities.

Priority 2: Stabilize Rural Hospitals Through Modifications to the Critical Access Hospital Program

The proposal would also stabilize the financial position of rural hospitals.

- **Critical Access Hospitals:** More rural hospitals could seek participation in the Critical Access Hospital (CAH) program designed to reduce financial vulnerability.
- **Reimbursement:** CAHs would receive increased reimbursement for home health care and emergency medical services.
- **Co-Location of Services:** Certain rural hospitals would be allowed to operate in the same facility as rural clinics and specialty physicians, improving efficiency and making care more convenient for patients.

Priority 3: Provide Funding to Modernize and "Right Size" Rural Facilities

The proposal would provide one-time infrastructure funding to certain rural hospitals.

- **Facility Upgrades:** Eligible hospitals could seek funding for facility upgrades to help transition to smaller, more efficient facilities. Funding could be used to eliminate safety hazards or comply with licensing or accreditation standards.
- **Facility Relocation:** Funds could also be used for relocation to a new facility – if a new facility would be more cost-effective than remodeling.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Reaching Out to Members of Congress

UnityPoint Health, in partnership with other health systems across the state and the Iowa Hospital Association, is working to maintain access to essential health care services in our rural communities.

Proposed rural health policy changes would address the challenges in rural communities by maintaining 24/7 emergency services in rural areas, stabilizing rural hospitals and providing funding to modernize and right-size rural facilities.

By lending your voice in support of these policy priorities, you can help us turn the tide on rural health care in Iowa and across the country and ensure our rural communities continue to have options close to home.

Most Effective Way to Help: Call Senator Grassley

As Chairman of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, Senator Chuck Grassley holds one of the most influential roles in Congress. **The single most effective way you can support rural health care in your community is to call Senator Grassley's Washington D.C. office at (202) 224-3744.** Please call to voice your support and see *Tools You Can Use* on page 7 for a sample phone call script. Encourage your colleagues, community leaders, friends and family members to call as well.

Additional ways you can help us share this important opportunity with others:

- 1. Talk to your friends, neighbors and community leaders.** Discuss the state of rural health care in Iowa with your colleagues, friends and neighbors (see the *Rural Health Care in Iowa Fact Sheet* on page 3). Talk about the issues impacting Iowans and spread the word about the proposed policy solutions that could help provide health care options in rural communities (see the *Rural Health Priorities Fact Sheet* on page 4).
- 2. Contact your other elected Members of Congress.** Let your other Senator and Representative know you value rural health care in your community and ask for their support of proposed rural health care policies. See *Tools You Can Use* on pages 7-8 for sample letters, emails and phone call scripts to use when contacting Members of Congress. Contact information for the Iowa Congressional Delegation can be found on page 6.
- 3. Share this toolkit with others in your network.** If you know of other influential business or community leaders who value health care opportunities for rural Iowans, pass along this toolkit and ask for their support of these proposed rural health care policy priorities. (A sample email to your network is included on page 8.)

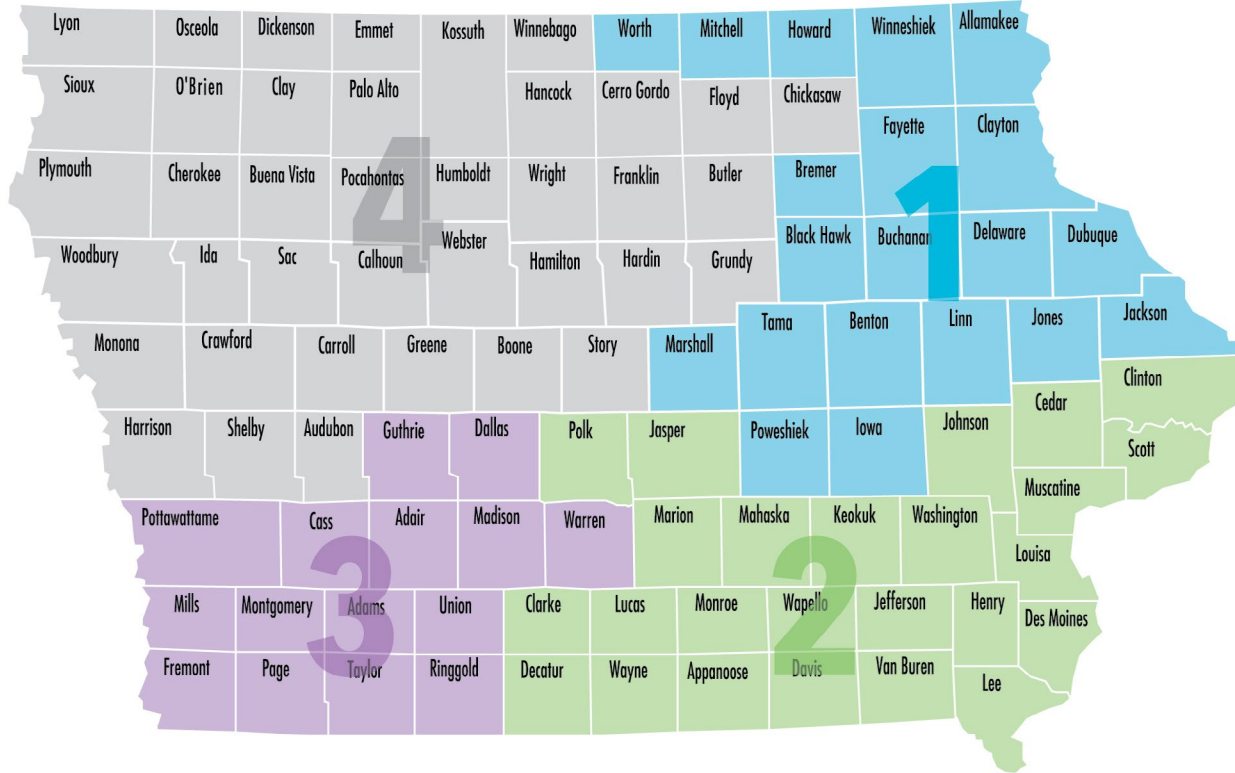
Your Feedback is Important to Us.

If you contact any of your elected officials, we would love to know. After reaching out, please complete our quick survey [here](#) to let us know how it went. Information collected will be used for internal UnityPoint Health purposes only.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Contact Information for Iowa Congressional Delegation



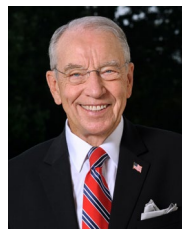
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TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Phone Call (Most Effective Tool)

Sample Phone Script:

When calling the office of your representative or senator, it's important to identify yourself, give your profession and let them know you are a constituent. Ask to speak with a staff member who handles health care, and if they are not available ask if you can leave a message with the staffer you are speaking with at that time. Give the staffer your message and ask for the legislator's support. Confirm the lawmaker's position on the issue before ending the call. Remember to be succinct, courteous and thank the person for their time.

"Hi, my name is [NAME], and I'm a [PROFESSION] in [REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR]'s district. I'm calling to ask for [HIS/HER] support of rural health legislation being considered by fellow Members of Congress that would help many of Iowa's rural hospitals maintain access to critical services in their communities and to provide adequate payment for those essential services. As a [CEO/BOARD MEMBER/STAFF MEMBER/COMMUNITY LEADER] for [HOSPITAL NAME] in [CITY, STATE], I support the three-pronged approach to providing help to Iowa's rural hospitals that was developed by UnityPoint Health, MercyOne and the Iowa Hospital Association and has been shared with [REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR].

More than 2 in 5 Iowans live in rural communities and depend on small rural hospitals and clinics for their health care needs. However, data shows at least 17 of Iowa's rural hospitals are at risk of closing if conditions do not change significantly in the coming years.

I encourage [REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR] to support policy changes to protect health care options for rural Iowans like myself. Can you tell me if [REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR] plans to support this issue? Thank you!"



TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Email

Sample Email to Encourage Support from Your Network:

EMAIL SUBJECT: Protecting our health care

Hi, [NAME].

Did you know that more than 40% of Iowans live in rural communities and depend on small rural hospitals and clinics for their health care needs? But, like many similar communities across the country, Iowa's rural towns face a number of challenges in maintaining access to this care.

National studies show at least 17 of our rural hospitals are at risk of closing if financial conditions do not improve.

I support a new three-pronged proposal that was developed by UnityPoint Health, MercyOne and the Iowa Hospital Association. This proposal would create a new kind of hospital called a Rural Emergency Hospital to help maintain 24/7 emergency services in rural areas. It would also stabilize rural hospitals and provide funding to modernize and right-size rural facilities.

Will you join me in support of these proposed priorities by calling Senator Grassley at (202) 224-3744 and calling or writing our other members of Congress and discussing this issue with others in your networks? I've attached a few resources you may find helpful.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

[NAME/TITLE/ORGANIZATION]

Sample Email to Legislators:

EMAIL SUBJECT: Please protect rural health care for Iowans!

Dear Senator/Representative [LAST NAME],

[Brief introduction explaining you are writing because you are concerned about rural health care in Iowa and give a brief background of your relationship to the issue.]

I am asking for you to support the rural health legislation being considered by your fellow Members of Congress. This legislation would create a new kind of hospital called a Rural Emergency Hospital to help maintain 24/7 emergency services in rural areas. It would also stabilize rural hospitals and provide funding to modernize and right-size rural facilities.

More than 2 in 5 Iowans live in rural communities and depend on small rural hospitals and clinics for their health care needs. However, national studies show at least 17 of Iowa's rural hospitals are at risk of closing if conditions do not change significantly in the coming years.

[Explain your position or connection to the community and why rural health matters to you.]

I urge you to support increased funding for rural health care in Iowa and beyond to ensure residents in our rural communities maintain access to essential services close to home. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Name/Title/Organization]