



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/rural-health-care-workers>

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Extension agents key to program that improves access to health care information, services

Kansas is among leading states that certify community health workers

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – More than a dozen counties in northeast and southeast Kansas are capitalizing on the reach of the state’s extension system to address their residents’ challenges related to rural health care access.

Susie Latta, a family and consumer sciences agent in K-State Research and Extension’s Marshall County office, said extension agents have been the key to helping people in their communities find the help they need – and when they need it – as part of what’s known as the [Rural Ag Health Community Health Worker project](#).

“You know, it’s not as easy to go to Kansas City when you’re 80 years old, and not everybody has the support system they need to get transportation to health care services,” Latta said.

She notes that residents may not know what medical specialists come to their community, or whether transportation might be available to get them where they can find quality health care.

“People want the confidence in their decision-making process; to know the pros and cons of various decisions and their options,” Latta said. “I know people (in Marysville) who are turning 65 and new to Medicare. They don’t know who to trust or where to go for non-biased information, and so K-State Research and Extension has been providing them the answers and education in a simple format that assists them in making good decisions about the health insurance they’ll need for the remainder of their lives.”

The program in Marysville and Marshall County was spurred by financial support from the [K-State 105 program](#), which Kansas State University officials say was established to support economic growth and advancement in Kansas.

K-State 105 leverages the statewide K-State Research and Extension network to deliver the full breadth of the university’s collective knowledge and solution-driven innovation to every Kansan, right where they live and work.

Additionally, K-State 105 forges the connections and partnerships that create access to additional expertise within other state institutions and agencies, nonprofits and organizations — all part of an effort to build additional capacities and strengths in each of the 105 counties in the state.

The Rural Ag Health Community Health Worker project is also gaining traction in four nearby extension districts – Meadowlark (Nemaha, Jackson and Jefferson counties), River Valley (Republic, Washington, Cloud and Clay), Wildcat (Wilson, Montgomery and Labette) and Southwind (Woodson, Allen, Bourbon and Neosho).

Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation’s Distinguished Professor of Community Health at Kansas State University, said [Kansas is among 12 states that certify community health workers](#). The program is administered through the [Kansas Division of Public Health](#).

“K-State Research and Extension is the first extension system to employ community health workers in local units to assist with rural health care education, identify service gaps and connect clients to health care providers for care and local health care access,” she said.”

Johannes adds: “When we think about rural and frontier communities, there just aren’t enough full-time providers. Community health workers are an important link for their communities.”

Johannes said that to become certified, community health workers must complete 160 hours of training, which includes 60 hours in the field, or they can submit documentation of prior community health work. More information is available from [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

Latta said that while the program is just getting started in eastern counties, the program can be implemented through any extension office in Kansas.

“As a local extension agent, I’m a trusted person,” she said. “In small, rural communities, nobody wants people to know that they may be struggling or they need some kind of financial help. I get to know them pretty well, so they feel more comfortable talking about their health needs and financial concerns. Extension agents and community health workers become a resource and a confidant that they can trust to get them the information or services they need.”

More information about the Rural Ag Health Community Health Worker project is [available online](#). Learn more about K-State 105 at [k-state.edu/105](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Rural Ag Health Community Health Worker project, <https://www.k-state.edu/105/projects/rural-ag-health-community-health-worker.html>

K-State 105, <https://www.k-state.edu/105>

Kansas Community Health Worker certification, <https://kschw.org/certification>

Kansas Division of Public Health (community health workers), <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1770/Community-Health-Workers>

K-State Research and Extension statewide locations, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit www.ksre.ksu.edu. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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