

From the Director



As the new Director of the Kansas Center for Rural Health, I am happy to introduce our new quarterly newsletter series. This newsletter series will serve as the primary means of communicating the center's ongoing activities, programs, and initiatives throughout the year. In this first newsletter, we are happy to provide you with information on our Rural Health Council Committees, funding opportunities for rural research, upcoming events aligned with the center, and a little more about myself and my background.

You will also find a research spotlight on the forthcoming Access to Maternal Care in Kansas Report. This report, forthcoming in March and led by Dr. Karen Weis, provides timely and invaluable data on our ongoing challenges with access to maternal care across the rural reaches of our state. We intend to spotlight an ongoing rural research project or program in each of these newsletters. If you have a project, paper, or program you would like to see us spotlight, please reach out!

The Kansas Center for Rural Health continues to pursue its mission focused on identifying and reducing rural health disparities and improving the rural healthcare workforce and care delivery across the state of Kansas. As we continue to develop programs in our two primary avenues of education and research, you will find information on these growing programs both in these newsletters and on our website—which we are actively updating and where we have begun adding new resources for both public audiences and KUMC. If you have never engaged with the center, or have not engaged with us recently, I encourage you to reach out and consider joining one of our committees, detailed later in the newsletter. By participating in these committees, you can help organize efforts to advance rural health in Kansas, while also expanding your network of collaborators and partners.

As a center, we are here to serve as a partner in reducing health disparities and improving rural health, healthcare access, and the healthcare workforce across the state. We are actively looking for partners in these efforts and I welcome engagement from all organizations, faculty, or agencies aligned in this effort. Please reach out if you would like to connect, I am always happy to hop on a call or grab a coffee.

There are a number of new initiatives in the works, so stay tuned and watch this space!

Sincerely,

Tom Mueller, Ph.D.

Director of the Kansas Center for Rural Health
Assistant Professor, Department of Population Health

Spotlight on Research: Access to Maternal Care Mapping



However, the availability of OB/GYNs and pediatricians is more grave. In Kansas, 61.4% of counties do not have an OB/GYN and there are only 330 pediatricians statewide. The lack of providers negatively affects the regionalization of care models that are recommended for improving healthcare in states with large rural communities.

Additionally, the need for specially trained nurses in obstetrics as well as anesthesia coverage 24/7/365 for all facilities providing inpatient maternity care has created large gaps in reimbursement for Critical Access Hospitals that exist primarily on a Medicare-reimbursement model. Their ability to sustain maternity care is difficult at best. The resource heavy requirements combined with the issues surrounding reimbursement are leading to the growing obstetrical deserts in Kansas.

What does the report suggest is needed to improve maternal healthcare in Kansas?

Foremost, Kansas legislators, healthcare systems, foundations, professional organizations and educational institutions are all working hard to address the concerns of access to care and the healthcare workforce. Sound data is needed to support these efforts. The Access to Maternity Care in Kansas report is a first step in gathering that data in one central source.

Central to ensuring access to the full spectrum of low- to high-risk maternity care services is the need for regionalization of care, which requires the availability of specialists at regional support hospitals or tertiary care systems. Maintaining the necessary specialists requires monitoring and continual workforce considerations for the balance of services.

Transportation and lodging needs are also critical to ensuring timely care for mothers and babies.

Lastly, eighty-six percent of Kansas hospitals experienced losses on services in 2023. Economy-wide inflation grew by 12.4% between 2021 and 2023, which was more than double the growth in reimbursement for inpatient hospital care. New innovative models for providing and reimbursing maternal care services must be considered.

When and where will the report be available?

We hope to officially distribute the report in both paper and electronic formats in March. There will be a QR Code available on the Kansas Nursing Workforce Center and the Kansas Center for Rural Health webpages.



Researcher: Karen Weis, Ph.D., RNC-OB, FAAN, Professor, Christine A. Hartley Rural Health Nursing Professorship, Interim Dean of School of Nursing Salina

What is the purpose of the report?

The purpose of the Access to Maternity Care in Kansas report is to provide information on the critical resources necessary for ensuring positive outcomes for mothers and babies. To do this we mapped the resources necessary for providing maternal healthcare and the access by ZIP code for the state of Kansas, thus providing information for informed decisions and identifying gaps requiring targeted intervention.

What are the key findings from the report?

One of the most intriguing findings was that the highest number of births by population density for reproductive age women are occurring in the western counties with the greatest distance to maternity care. In fact, the median birthrate in urban counties is 61, and rural counties have a significantly higher median birthrate of 67. We found that 59% of Kansas counties do not have inpatient maternity care services, 13% of ZIP codes were farther than 30 miles, and 46% were farther than 15 miles to the nearest facility.

When assessing the availability of providers, our data reflected good availability to family medicine physicians who are educated and trained to provide healthcare for the entire family from birth through the lifespan. The family physician to patient ratios are better in Kansas than those reported for many states and the ratios are better for rural than urban, reflecting good numbers for rural family medicine.

A Special Thank You to our Outgoing Director



Robert P. Moser, M.D., professor of population health, has transitioned from his role as executive director of the Kansas Center for Rural Health to serve as full-time medical director of The University of Kansas Health System's Care Collaborative. The Care Collaborative is a patient safety organization comprised of a network of healthcare providers and teams using evidence-based models to optimize care and improve health outcomes throughout the state of Kansas.

Dr. Moser has been involved with the Care Collaborative since 2014 and has served as medical director since 2019. He will remain active in the Kansas Center for Rural Health and the Rural Health Council that supports the mission of the center following the transition. Dr. Moser was instrumental in leading the formation of the Kansas Center for Rural Health, which launched in 2022 to foster and sustain improvements necessary to address health outcome disparities across rural Kansas. The center provides infrastructure to support collaborations among researchers and educators from the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Health Professions and rural health stakeholders across the state. His wealth of knowledge and experience in primary care, health care delivery systems and public health, and his continued engagement in advocacy across the state was instrumental in establishing the center. We wish you the best.

KCRH Welcomes New Director

The Kansas Center for Rural Health is proud to welcome J. Tom Mueller, Ph.D., as its Director and Assistant Professor of Population Health at the University of Kansas Medical Center. A rural sociologist and demographer, Dr. Mueller's research explores the geography of well-being and the environment in rural America, with a focus on:

- Health and well-being in rural communities
- Environmental injustice and environmental health
- The measurement and tracking of poverty across geographic spaces

His work has been featured in leading academic journals, including the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Journal of Rural Health*, *Nature Water*, *Nature Communications*, *Demography*, and *Rural Sociology*. He actively secures research funding and is currently engaged in projects supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, among others.

Dr. Mueller's upcoming book, *The Case for Rural America*, is set to be released by University of North Carolina Press in Fall 2025.

A Kansas native, Dr. Mueller grew up in Merriam, KS, before earning degrees from the University of Montana and Penn State University, where he completed his Ph.D. in Rural Sociology and Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment. Before joining KU Medical Center in 2023, he held faculty positions at Utah State University and the University of Oklahoma.

We are excited to have Dr. Mueller leading the charge in advancing rural health research and advocacy in Kansas and beyond!

Opportunity Funding: Call for Pilot Research Proposals

The Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging (INRPHA) is inviting proposals on rural health and aging trends and disparities. Awards are for a total cost of \$35,000 and the deadline is May 1st, 2025. Click the link to learn more!

[Learn More About INRPHA Opportunity](#)

Rural Health Council Committees

Members of the **KU Medical Center community** can **collaborate alongside colleagues** dedicated to **advancing rural health**. Members of the Rural Health Council Committees meet to **share, promote, collaborate and network** across KU Medical Center, advancing the mission of the Center for Rural Health. For more information contact KCRH@kumc.edu or visit the [KCRH website](#).

- ◆ Behavioral and Mental Health
- ◆ Rural Research
- ◆ Community Health Across the Lifespan
- ◆ Maternal Child & Family Health
- ◆ Data and Informatics
- ◆ Workforce/Pipeline Pathways

Upcoming Events



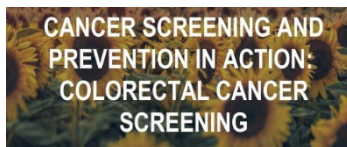
I-CAN 2025 ECHO: IMPROVING Access to Pulmonary Rehabilitation in Kansas Communities

Tuesdays, March 4—April 1, 2025 - Noon CST

**** NO SESSION ON MARCH 18***

[Details of I-CAN 2025 ECHO](#)

This series addresses barriers to pulmonary rehab for Kansans with long COVID and chronic respiratory diseases, offering strategies to improve access and reduce health disparities.

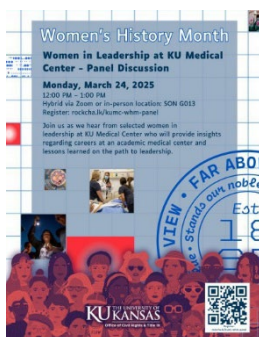


Cancer Screening and Prevention in Action: Colorectal Cancer Screening Webinar

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 - Noon CST

[Details of Screening Webinar](#)

Join the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Cancer Partnership, and Masonic Cancer Alliance for the fourth session of their five-part webinar series on colorectal cancer. Designed for healthcare professionals, this session covers screening criteria and strategies to improve screening rates. Live participants can earn Continuing Education credits!



Women in Leadership at KU Medical Center—Panel Discussion

Monday, March 24, 2025 - Noon CST

Hybrid via Zoom or in-person location: SON G013

[Details of Panel Discussion](#)

Join us as we hear from selected women in leadership at KU Medical Center who will provide insights regarding careers at an academic medical center and lessons learned on the path to leadership.

Upcoming Events



Kansas HOSA State Leadership Conference 2025
March 26 - 27, 2025

[Details of Leadership Conference](#)

HOSA-Future Health Professionals is an international student organization endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education that aims to promote career opportunities in the healthcare industry and enhance the delivery of quality healthcare to all people.

For more information contact Tina Goosz at tgoosz@kumc.edu.



Teacher Externship Day
Thursday, May 1, 2025, Wednesday, June 4, 2025

[Details of Teacher Externship Day](#)

A free, one-day event held 3-4 times a year for Kansas health science teachers. It offers hands-on experiences with KU Medical Center and KU Health System programs, including lab visits, admissions meetings, and facility tours.

For more information contact Tina Goosz at tgoosz@kumc.edu



Rural Oncology Conference Kansas 2025
June 6-7, 2025, 8:00 A.M. - 1:30 P. M. CST

The Oread Lawrence, Tapestry Collection by Hilton 1200 Oread Avenue Lawrence, KS 66044

[Details of Rural Oncology Conference](#)

A unique event bringing together healthcare professionals, researchers, advocates, and policymakers to address the unique challenges and opportunities in rural cancer care.

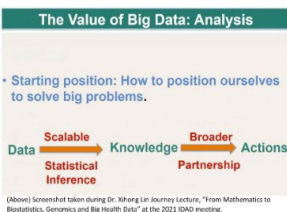


2025 MCA Annual Meeting
Friday, April 4, 2025, 8 A.M. - 4 P.M. CST

Sheraton Overland Park Hotel Convention Center 6100 College Blvd., Overland Park, KS

[Details of MCA Annual Meeting](#)

Join us for a weekend of collaboration, learning & networking at one location. Attend the [MCA Annual Meeting](#) on Friday, April 4 and stay for the [KUMC Multidisciplinary Oncology Review](#) on Saturday, April 5. Both meetings will be held at the Sheraton Overland Park Hotel. Register today to reserve your seat & receive meeting updates. Questions – [contact Lety](mailto:contact@lety.com) (913) 945-6686.



18th Annual Innovations in Design, Analysis, and Dissemination: Frontiers in Biostatistics & Data Science Meeting

Friday, April 17—18, 2025, 8 A.M. - 4 P.M. CST

Ad Astra room, 5th floor, Health Education Building (HEB)
University of Kansas Medical Center Campus, Kansas City, KS

[Details of Annual Meeting](#)

IDAD is a premier regional event for biostatistics and data science researchers. This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Lu Wang, Professor of Biostatistics at the University of Michigan. Don't miss this opportunity to connect and explore the latest in statistical research!

Upcoming Events



Women in Health Care: The Next Generation
Thursday, Oct. 24, 2025, 8:30 A.M. - 4 P.M. CST

[Details of Women in Healthcare](#)

A free, 3-day program for 14-16 high school junior and senior girls across Kansas. Hosted by KU Med AHEC, it connects students with health care professionals, faculty, and peers to inspire future leaders in medicine.

For more information contact Tina Goosz at tgoosz@kumc.edu.

Featured Reads: Publications & Articles

"Exploring Access to Critical Health Services for Older Adults in Rural America from 1990 to 2020" – Elizabeth A. Bambury, BS; Alexis A. Merdjanoff, Ph.D.; Joshua T. Fergen, Ph.D.; J. Tom Mueller, Ph.D., *Journal of Rural Health*, February 28, 2025. [Read full article click here >>](#)

"Blood Banking Services in Critical Access Hospitals in Kansas: A Laboratory Perspective" – Letycia Nuñez-Argote, Ph.D.; Alexandra Corns, BS; Robert Moser, M.D., *American Journal of Clinical Pathology*, December 20, 2024. [Read full article click here >>](#)

"Novel Solutions for a Complex Problem: How Do We Build Stronger Orthopaedic Care in Rural Areas" – Lisa Ronback, MD, FAAOS, FRCSC; James Barber, M.D., FAAOS, *AAOS Now*, January 29, 2025. [Read full article click here >>](#)

"The State of Musculoskeletal Health in Rural America" – Kim Templeton, M.D., FAAOS, FAOA, *AAOS Now*, January 29, 2025. [Read full article click here>>](#)

"Building the Pipeline: Where Will the Next Generation of Rural Orthopaedic Surgeons Come From?" – Kim Templeton, M.D., FAAOS, FAOA, *AAOS Now*, January 29, 2025. [Read full article click here >>](#)

"Nursing Practice Considerations for Medicare's Reimbursement Model of Rural Emergency Hospitals" – Karen L. Weis, Ph.D., RNC-OB, FAAN; Deena Woodall, Ph.D., RN; Teale Ryan, Ph.D., MS, RN; Lisa Larson, Ph.D., RN, *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, January 2025. [Read full article click here >>](#)

One last thing before you go!

Stay connected with us! Visit the [KCRH website](#) for the latest updates, resources, and upcoming events. Don't forget to [follow us on Facebook](#) for daily insights, stories, and conversations that matter. Let's keep the momentum going—join the community and stay in the loop!

The Kansas Center for Rural Health aims to identify and reduce rural health disparities and improve the rural healthcare workforce and care delivery through research, education and service.