

Health Inequalities Study Committee Meeting
November 9, 2007

James X. Kennedy, Program Officer
Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York

Jim is former director of the Cayuga Rural Health Network; before that he worked in the Ontario County Office for Aging, and was a nursing home administrator. Currently, he is the new program officer for the 8-county CNY region of the CHF, which was formed as a result of merger of HMO's purchased by Excellus about 7 years ago. The Foundation has selected frail elders and children in communities of poverty as its priority areas of focus for the next three to five years.

Rural Issues – Jim was asked to address rural issues based on experience gained in his work in Cayuga County.

- Migrant Workers – the number of migrant workers, who are typically uninsured, is increasing, and workers are becoming more year-round workers, replacing family workers on dairy and truck farms and wineries.
- Work Force – As in cities, the lack of sufficient numbers of health care workers at all levels is a problem in rural areas. Shortages are especially acute in mental health care; telemedicine is being used in some areas for consultations and evaluations via video conferencing.
- Nutritional Issues – As in areas of the cities, convenience stores are more prevalent than grocery stores and they do not carry fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Dental care – lack of dental care, exacerbated by lack of fluoridation in some areas is also a major problem, as in the city.
- Transportation costs and availability – Rising cost of gas, as well as the fact that people have to travel farther for work, makes it more difficult for workers and their families to access healthcare.

“Nut & Bolts” – Jim mentioned this targeted effort, in which funded projects look at best practices to improve children's health in communities of poverty. Funded organizations come together to build relationships, share best practices.