



## **Knowing Where to Start: Accessing Mental Health Resources in Rural Colorado**

*By Irene Etsitty, Acting State Director, USDA Rural Development, Colorado*

People, no matter where they live, should have access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care. While society is getting more comfortable discussing mental health, it can still be difficult knowing where to start when it comes to taking care of your own well-being.

This year, as we celebrate [Mental Health Awareness Month](#), we think about where to start, we want to make sure that conversations include how important it is to have access to these services and are available for people who live in the most remote and rural parts of the country. When rural America thrives, we all thrive.

As the Acting State Director for USDA Rural Development in Colorado, I've seen firsthand the unique challenges of people living in rural Colorado. Rural communities often suffer from lack of access to many mental health and educational resources they need and deserve.

The Biden-Harris Administration has been clear about its commitment to making sure people, no matter where they live, have access to high-quality health care by expanding high speed internet and telehealth services to rural and tribal communities across the nation. We also know that access to mental and behavioral health care is an important component to ensuring people everywhere can thrive.

That's why USDA Rural Development is committed to providing resources and services to improve the overall health and wellness in rural communities. One area we can start to make a difference is by helping our kids in our local schools.

In Colorado, the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program is providing three Colorado entities with funds with mental health and educational resources. Campo School District, Lincoln Health and South Central BOCES were awarded funding to deliver mental health services, via telemedicine in their local schools. Once the projects are completed and the equipment is installed, the services will help enhance student achievement, improve emotional stability and increase health equity.

Throughout the month of May, USDA Rural Development is sharing success stories and resources we have available to improve mental and behavioral health across the country for everyone. Through the recently launched [USDA Rural Health webpage](#), we are even better equipped than before to share information, data, and USDA resources that can directly improve mental and behavioral health in rural and tribal communities.

You can learn more about our programs in Colorado by visiting [our website](#). Together, I am confident that we can help create and sustain economic prosperity in our rural communities across our great state.