



*June 2025*



*Rural project representation at the 2025 Information & Education Days. Go rural!*

Greetings Rural Partners!

to see so many of our rural projects represented!

This month, we feature the Rural Caucus meeting led by our RISE Up Leadership Academy participants, cessation training success in Lake County, meet our new RISE Advisory Committee member, Shannon Essig, and learn about Shelly's interest in the history of the tobacco movement.

We also said thank you and goodbye to our intern, Hayley Shafer, and welcome our summer intern, Audrey Howes. Audrey is co-creating this month's newsletter, helping manage our listservs, and will be engaged in other RISE related projects through mid-August. You can meet her at the Rural Initiatives Workgroup and learn more about Audrey in the coming months in RISE News. Reach Audrey at [ahowes@healthcollaborative.org](mailto:ahowes@healthcollaborative.org).

Wishing you all safety and ease.

*Shelly, JoAnn, Sue, & Audrey*



## *Upcoming Events*



### **Rural Tobacco Cessation Discussion Group (Bimonthly)**

*First Monday of the month every other month*

**August 4, 2025  
2:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 854 6565 2523  
Passcode: 265859  
Phone in: 669-444-9171

**Rural Initiatives Workgroup (RIW)**

*Third Tuesday of the month*

**Tuesday, June 17, 2025**

**3:00 - 4:30 PM**

**Topics / Guests**

***Leslie Zellers, JD***

***Policy Evaluation Tracking System (PETS)***

***Public Health Institute (PHI)***

**How can PETS meet rural education and policy tracking needs?**

The Public Health Institute (PHI) would like to hear from our rural projects about how the [Policy Evaluation Tracking System](#) (PETS) can meet our needs for tracking policy elements and educating policy makers. Specifically, they are looking for input on which types of policy elements/variables are important to rural communities in the areas of smokefree multi-unit housing, smokefree outdoor areas, and tobacco sales policies.

***Elisa Tong, M.D. M.A***

***Director, Tobacco Cessation Policy Research Center (TRPRC)***

**Rural County Cessation Capacity: Potential data needs, collaborations, and strategies**

This is a follow-up discussion from the 6.11.25 Project Director's Assn meeting about county cessation capacity with their Tobacco Cessation Policy Research Center and CA Quits. Medi-Cal managed care plans have a new tobacco quality metric for 2026 to measure assessment and treatment of their population. County behavioral health plans need to submit a population plan by mid-2026. What are potential data needs, collaborations, or strategies?

information, network, celebrate wins, and brainstorm challenges. Invitation only. Contact [Shelly Brantley](#).



### RISE Office Hours: Urban and Suburban Projects

*In observance of Juneteenth, the RISE offices will be closed on June 19th. The June Urban and Suburban office hours is cancelled and will resume*

*Third Thursdays of the month*

**July 17, 2025**

**2:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 8763130 5788

Passcode: 374332

Phone in: 669-444-9171

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Drop in office hours for urban and suburban projects working in rural jurisdictions.

Contact [JoAnn Saccato](#) to receive an Outlook calendar invite.



### June 20, 2025 Deadline for Enforcement Grants

California Department of Justice grants submission window opened **April 21, 2025**.

[Learn More & Apply](#)

**NCTOH Conference**  
**August 26-28, 2025**  
**Registration Open!**

things tobacco prevention can help you learn best practices, successful interventions, unique and innovative work that can be implemented and replicated locally in an atmosphere of collaboration and networking. Hear from national and international speakers about where the field of tobacco prevention is moving.

Your presence will also elevate rural project needs, innovations, and successes, providing inspiration for other rural communities throughout the nation.



[Learn More & Register](#)

## *Rural News & Successes*

### **2025 I&E Days Rural Caucus Meeting Culmination of RISE Up Leadership Academy Capstone Project**





*Photos by Kitsana Silva, Project Director, Si Se Puede.*

Congratulations to the 2025 RISE Up Leadership Academy cohort members! This year's I&E Days Rural Caucus meeting was organized academy participants as their capstone project. The cohort had to self-organize and attend to everything about the Rural Caucus meeting, including presenting a training to other Academy attendees on the difference of a caucus meeting vs. a regular legislative visit, researching the Rural Caucus leadership and staff, creating talking points, organizing speaker order, coordinating rural 'leave behind' materials, photographing the event, and follow up communication.

Rural Caucus training and meeting attendees included Jonathan Abidari (Humboldt County), Chrissy Adams (Smoke Free High Country), Daniel Benson (Calaveras County), Jo Hannah Douglas (Modoc County), Raider Fowler (Mariposa County), Julie Franklin (Siskiyou County), Sonya Gonzales (American Lung Association), Jacqueline Guerrero (Madera County), Phia Haleen (Smoke Free Marin), Vanessa Jimenez (Mendocino County), Marissa Mercado (REAL Project), Savannah Pascale (Calaveras County), Isabela Ribeiro (NorCal 4 Health), Kitsana Silva (Si Se Puede), Rene Silva (Madera County), Sadie Spargur (United Indian Health Services), Grace Vasquez (Smoke Free Marin). The caucus meeting also included guests Angelica Garcia, Alejandra Valazquez, and Jessica Colin of the Voices Inspiring Valley Action (VIVA) project (American Cancer Society Action Network).

according to Mr. Romero. The speakers (Chrissy Adams, Raider Fowler, and Isabela Ribeiro) took advantage of that bit of information as they offered important talking points and questions about working with local elected officials. Mr. Romero was open to follow up and support through the senator's newsletter. Jacqueline Guerrero, the designated follow up team member, promptly followed up with a thank you email and photos of the event, including sample captions.

Shelly Brantley, Rise Project Director, reflected that this was one of the best organized and well attended Rural Caucus meetings she's participated in.

"I'm really proud of our RISE Up Academy attendees," she noted, "and they should be proud of themselves! They demonstrated great skill and should now have the confidence to organize their coalitions to present to their local elected officials."

RISE Up Leadership Academy will be offered again in Spring 2026 to coincide with the 2026 Rural Caucus meeting. The academy is open to rural project staff new (2 years or less) to tobacco prevention work.

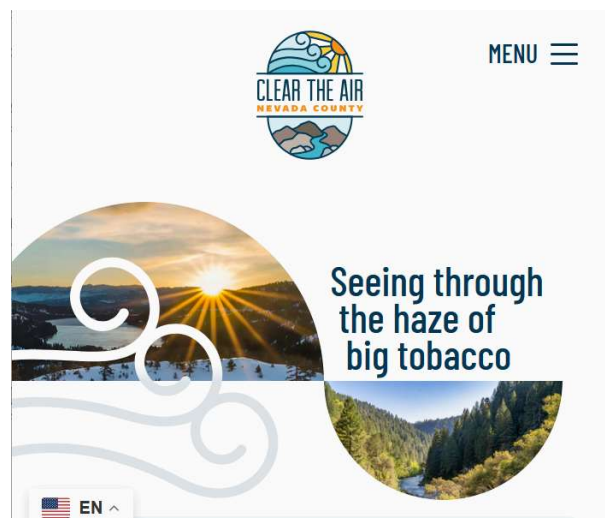
## Read the 2025 Rural Caucus Fact Sheet

### Coalition Launches New Website

Nevada County's coalition, Clear the Air Nevada County, launched their new website recently. Check it out!

*Proud of your coalition website? Send us a link and we may feature it in a future issue of RISE News!*

[Access Website](#)



**Lake and Mendocino County  
Collaboration Trains 28 New  
Tobacco Cessation Facilitators**



*Facilitator Lou Moerner and attendees at the Lake & Mendocino County Cessation Facilitator Training, April 23, 2025. (Photo courtesy of HOPE Rising Lake County.)*

**Read LakeCoNews  
Article**

Rising, along with Adventist Health Clear Lake, Blue Zones Project Lake County, Sutter Lakeside Hospital, Lake County Public Health, Kno'Qoti Native Wellness Inc., Lake County Office of Education, Mendocino County Public Health, Lakeview Health Center, and Konociti Unified School District hosted a cessation facilitator training.

Facilitated by Lou Moerner of Lou Moerner Consulting, the 28 participants received training on topics including the intensity of nicotine addiction, improved quality of life after quitting, and how to guide participants to create personalized quit plans. Moerner provides culturally relevant trainings for cessation facilitators and can be reached at [lou.moerner@gmail.com](mailto:lou.moerner@gmail.com)

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***Want your project or community's work featured in a future issue of RISE News?***

Contact [JoAnn](#).

### ***RISE Advisory Committee Spotlight***

*RISE is proud to have committed representation from each of our California rural area regions through our Advisory Committee. Committee members are tasked with meeting monthly to provide the RISE team with feedback on educational material development, outreach strategies, policy goals, and more. We acknowledge and appreciate the dedication and expertise each committee member brings to our RISE efforts!*

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## Shannon Essig

*Project Coordinator & Social Media Specialist  
Mariposa County Health and Human Services*

Shannon Essig is the newest RISE Advisory Committee member. After a career change from nonprofit leadership and management for 26 years, Shannon began her journey working in tobacco prevention with the Mariposa County Tobacco Education Program. There, she started in the role of the Community Engagement Coordinator in 2022 and, in 2023, stepped into her current role as the Project Coordinator and Media Specialist.

Shannon grew up living in rural communities surrounded by hardworking folks, such as teachers, farmers, military and law enforcement. She saw the effects of smoking, using dip/chew, and, more recently, vaping within her community.

Shannon believes tobacco prevention work creates some of the most “sophisticated, top of class public policy, strategic communications, and capacity building talent in not only health education, but in your entire Public Health department.” She expresses a desire to learn more tobacco prevention practices from RISE and other committee members, while also bringing her expertise and experience to the table.

*“What keeps me in tobacco prevention is the dynamic nature of the work, which is challenging, creative, analytical, multi-faceted, and independent.”*

*~Shannon Essig*

new to tobacco work in rural communities, she encourages folks to explore different strategies. “There are a lot of awesome organizations and groups doing amazing work around the country that will provide great concrete resources and examples, and at the very least inspire you. And if you can’t find something, ask!”

One of the most important things she’s learned is that tobacco prevention work requires a strong skill set that responds well in a legislative environment.

Also, from her living and working in rural communities for so long, she knows how they can quickly adapt to challenges such as fires and floods, but long term social norm change can be “hobbled by conservative rigidity.”

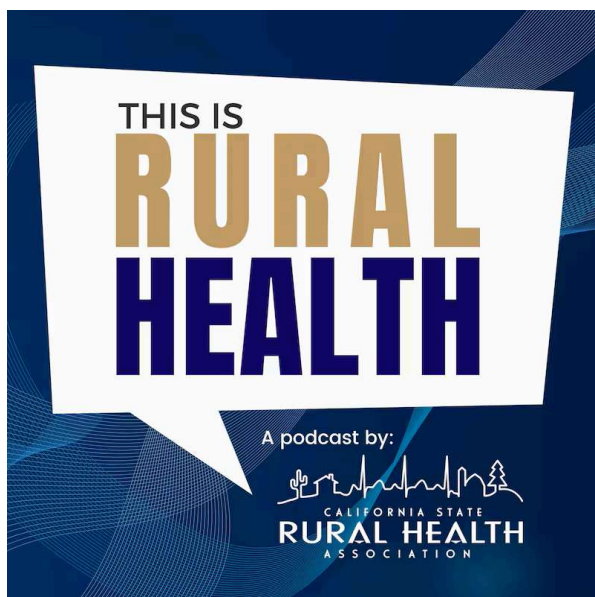
Tabling is often an opportunity to provide education and form networks, however tobacco prevention work is “a whole new ballgame in Public Health and Health Education,” Shannon notes. “The focus is on public policy, strategic communications, and building up coalitions” to strengthen new strategies in prevention.

In her free time, Shannon enjoys spending time in her garden growing food, herbs and flowers. She also makes art in her studio and collects more books than she has time to read, and enjoys evenings with her friends and attending live music shows.

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*The Rise team looks forward to having Shannon on the Advisory Council! You can reach her at [sessig@mariposacounty.org](mailto:sessig@mariposacounty.org)*

## *Rural Resources & Info*



### **May CSRHA Podcast Focuses on Revolutionizing Rural Health Education**

The California State Rural Health Association (CSRHA) produces a podcast, This is Rural Health, which brings together leaders in rural health care, policy advisors, and other forward thinkers to help understand what is happening in the rural healthcare ecosystem.

podcast [#47 Rural Wellness: Revolutionizing Rural Health Education](#), with guests including the founder of the Berkeley Rural Health Innovation Program, Lynn Barr, MPH and RISE Advisory Committee member, Rexanne Greenstreet.

*(See below for more information on the Berkeley Rural Health Innovation Program.)*

## Rural MPH Program Offers Full Scholarships; Application Period for 2026 Cohort Open

As we know, public health providers in rural areas face very different challenges than those in urban areas. Yet most public health master's programs lack programming focused specifically on rural public health.

In response, Berkeley Public Health Online has launched the Rural Health Innovation Program. With backing from the Barr-Campbell Family Foundation, This program provides full-tuition scholarships for public health professionals living and working in rural communities to pursue a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree online.

This 27-month program is designed for working people interested in improving their knowledge and practice in public health.

This program provides full-tuition scholarships for public health professionals living and working in rural communities to pursue a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree online. Scholars also receive a paid membership in the National Rural Health Association (NRHA).

Berkeley Public Health



[Learn more](#)

Scholars come from a variety of backgrounds, including health care, policy, and community leadership. They continue working in their rural communities while completing their degrees. The program is designed to support professionals who are committed to improving health outcomes in rural areas.

More information, including scholar profiles, is available [HERE](#).

[Applications accepted through August 3, 2025, for a January 2026 start date.](#)

scholarships to 81 professionals across 32 states. The next cohort will begin in Spring 2026. Participants will study alongside a larger, multidisciplinary public health cohort while also engaging in a smaller group with a specialized rural health curriculum. This structure allows scholars to gain broad public health training while focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities in rural health.

***"If rural is your passion, we encourage you to explore this exceptional opportunity!"***

***~Shelly Brantley, RISE Project Director***

*Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 2025, XX, 1–5  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ntn/ntaf104>  
 Advance access publication 2 June 2025  
 Commentary



## Tobacco Product Regulation: Opportunities for Advancing Health Equity in Rural America

Dana Carroll PhD<sup>1</sup>, F. Joseph McClemon PhD<sup>2</sup>, Suzanne Frisbee PhD<sup>3</sup>, Lorna Bittencourt MS<sup>1</sup>, Dana Rubenstein MD, MHS<sup>4</sup>, Jovan Gwon PhD<sup>5</sup>, Courtney Swinkels BA<sup>3</sup>, Devon Noonan PhD<sup>3,6</sup>

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Rural America—representing 97% of America's land mass and defined by small towns and sparsely populated areas—is home to one-fifth of all Americans.<sup>1</sup> In rural America, combustible cigarette smoking is a major challenge to health equity. Rural Americans start smoking at a younger age than their urban counterparts,<sup>2</sup> and, in 2020, the smoking prevalence in rural areas was estimated at nearly 19.2% compared to 14.4% in urban areas.<sup>3</sup>

has a long track record of targeting rural communities through tailored advertisements, reduced pricing, and sponsoring events traditionally located in more rural areas (eg, rodeos, car races).<sup>10–12</sup> Local governments serving rural areas tend to be less likely to enact smokefree policies and excise taxes when compared with urban counties.<sup>11</sup> Rural compared to urban Americans are also more likely to trust health-related information about tobacco products from to-

Downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/ntn/advance-article/doi/10.1093/ntn/ntaf104>

## Tobacco Product Regulation: Opportunities for Advancing Health Equity in Rural America

An upcoming article in *Nicotine and Tobacco Research Journal* highlights rural disparities and offers a multi-pronged approach to help reduce gaps.

"Rural America—representing 97% of America's land mass and defined by small towns and sparsely populated areas—is home to one-fifth of all Americans. In rural America, combustible cigarette smoking is a major challenge to health equity. Rural Americans start smoking at a younger age than their urban counterparts, and, in 2020, the smoking



rural areas. Data from the 2016–2017 Population Assessment of Tobacco Use and Health (PATH) study show that the odds of lifetime quitting are 23% lower among rural compared with urban people who smoke. Furthermore, others have shown that the odds of cessation following a quit attempt were 75% lower in rural versus urban areas during 2010–2020. Notably, differential interest in quitting smoking does not appear to be responsible for rural–urban smoking cessation disparities. Consequently, rural Americans experience high and persistent rates of smoking-related cancers and lives lost. In 2016, lung cancer incidence was 81.5 versus 63.0 per 100 000 in rural versus urban areas and was declining more slowly in rural versus urban areas (2.1 annual percentage change vs. 2.9 from 2007 to 2016)”

Strategies recommended include expansion of broadband access (to support cessation services via telehealth), expanding cessation services particularly before and after implementation of new regulations, and expanding the role of other healthcare providers for cessation services.

**Access full article through your Rover account.**

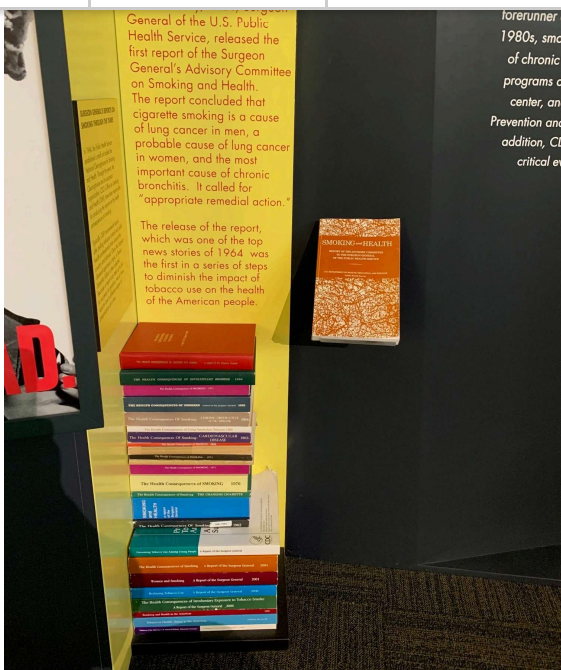
### *Trending Tidbits*



*RISE Project Director, Shelly Brantley, holds the original 1964 Surgeon General Report on Smoking and Health. May, 2025.*

RISE Project Director, Shelly Brantley, recently visited the CDC site in Atlanta where the original 1964 Surgeon General Report on Smoking and Health is displayed.

“As a public health nerd and quasi-tobacco historian (due to longevity, not age!), I geeked out when I saw this report,” Shelly beamed. “I spent the next hour and a half in the CDC museum thumbing through that historically significant document.” The report, which was based on the review of over 7,000 scientific articles, was considered a turning point in public health because it was the first comprehensive and authoritative government document stating that



*Display at the David J. Sencer CDC Museum in Atlanta, Georgia.*

heart disease, and other serious illnesses.

It's release ended decades of debate, shifting smoking from a personal choice to a major public health issue.

**Download Original Report**



### **Reminder: RISE is Here to Help!**

Need help building your work plan? Reporting? Learning how to engage with community? RISE is here to help with these topics and more. Email [JoAnn](#) or [Shelly](#) for technical assistance or submit a request using the link below...

**Request Technical Assistance**

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