

Rural Institute



2021 IMPACT REPORT

IMPROVING LIFE
FOR RURAL AMERICANS
WITH DISABILITIES



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



The Rural Institute's impact is broad. This year's summary features numbers, charts and a few stories describing our impact on people's lives. When it comes down to it, our work is about people and how we work together to make life better.

This fiscal year, the Rural Institute produced and shared over 200 products on wide-ranging topics. For example, [RTC:Rural](#) published several "America at a Glance" reports on the impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities. [The Child and Family Tip Sheet](#) collection offers guidance to support children with disabilities at play, at home and in school. The [Montana Voices Amplified](#) series serves as a "microphone" for individuals with disabilities and their families to share life experiences with others.

Our research and evaluation initiatives continue to focus on disability across life domains and geographies. We examined topics such as the impact of spinal cord injury on health, effective transportation networks, mental health and suicide prevention in American Indian communities, and acceptance and use of COVID-19 information in rural and urban communities. We explored issues ranging from health insurance for people with disabilities to

personal assistance services. The Montana Obstetrics and Maternal Support (MOMS) evaluation project established partnerships to improve the health of mothers and newborns, with an emphasis on improving maternal health outcomes in rural Montana communities.

This year we paused to evaluate ourselves and our future. We formed an Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI) workgroup to clarify our path forward. This Institute-wide effort established the foundation for in-depth strategic planning activities in 2022.

We are thankful for a rich and productive year while navigating the global pandemic. We look forward to continued growth with our partners in Montana and in rural communities across the U.S. Our relationships help us understand the best ways to promote inclusive communities for people of all abilities.

Warmly,

Martin Blair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martin Blair".

IMPACT

FY 2021



The Rural Institute had **48** active projects and programs



We published **42** reports, articles and book chapters



We shared **11** conference presentations and posters



We mentored **47** trainees across **15** disciplines



We provided **5,604** hours of training to people in Montana and across the country



47 UM students took a class sponsored by the Rural Institute



Rural Institute staff participated in **56** committees, councils and boards



RESEARCH



SERVICE



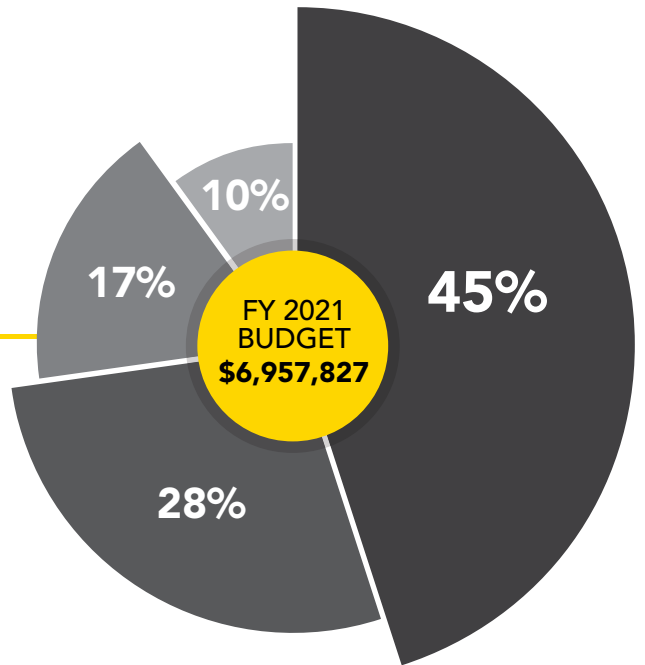
EVALUATION



EDUCATION

FY 2021 BUDGET

\$6,957,827



IMPACT ON STATE POLICY

The Rural Institute has a long history of supporting individuals as decision makers. We promote less-restrictive alternatives to guardianship by raising awareness on alternatives, developing and promoting tools to support decision-making, and providing technical assistance to policy makers and others.

Rural Institute staff provided background and technical support to pass Senate Bill 31: *An Act Requiring Consideration of Less Restrictive Alternatives in Adult Guardianship Proceedings*. The new state law, which took effect October 1, 2021, states the court can only approve a guardianship if other ways of supporting an adult's decision-making will not work. Those petitioning for guardianship must demonstrate less restrictive options have been tried, or why alternatives are not feasible. If a guardianship is approved, the person must be encouraged to build their decision-making skills.

Rural Institute staff provide resources to help Montanans follow the new law. For more information, go to the [Transition & Employment Projects – Alternatives to Guardianship](#) website.



IMPACT ON COMMUNITY HEALTH

The [Montana Disability and Health Program](#) (MTDH) ensures that community health needs are addressed for everyone. The needs of people with disabilities should be fully supported from the beginning, not as an afterthought. This year, MTDH worked with state and national partners to provide Montanans with disabilities and their families accurate COVID-19 information. This includes making sure that people with disabilities are included in emergency-response planning in each county.

IMPACT ON MATERNAL HEALTH



The Rural Institute provides research and evaluation support, and technical assistance to the [Montana Obstetrics and Maternal Support](#) (MOMS) project. MOMS helps local healthcare providers and specialists deliver effective prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care.

MOMS studies factors associated with increased risk of severe maternal morbidity, evaluates program training and obstetric care at critical access hospitals, and supports Montana's Maternal Mortality Review committee.

The Rural Institute and Billings Clinic distributed \$194,670 to 16 organizations in 9 Montana counties in support of MOMS' efforts to improve rural maternal health and well-being.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

Self-employment is an option for people with disabilities, particularly in rural communities where employment opportunities may be limited. Catherine Ipsen, Director of RTC:Rural, worked with stakeholders to build a website Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, counselors, and consumers can use for self-employment evaluation and planning.

The [Vocational Rehabilitation Self-Employment Guide](#) is helpful to any person with or without a disability interested in starting a business. The website includes captioned videos of Montana business owners with disabilities who discuss self-employment readiness, feasibility, and planning. The guide provides accessible worksheets to help write a business plan, assess finances, and forecast income and expenses. RTC:Rural offers Self-Employment Guide training to VR agencies.



IMPACT ON FAMILIES



The Montana Family to Family and MonTECH programs directly support Montanans with disabilities.

The parent-led [Montana Family to Family Health Information Center](#) (MT F2F) forges relationships with providers and programs, connects families to meaningful supports, and provides opportunities to learn and to share experiences.

This year, the MT F2F offered several opportunities for connection and support. A free online ‘Supporting Sibs’ series provided a safe forum for caregivers to discuss struggles inherent in raising multiple children when one child has additional needs. A Sibling Panel and online SibShop gave kids and teens a way to connect with peers and share their perspective.

Private pool parties for families with disabilities were well-attended by those looking to connect with other families. Hosted at waterparks in Great Falls, Helena, and Missoula, these relaxed occasions encouraged families to meet, share experiences, and learn more about the MT F2F.

[MonTECH](#) improves the quality of life for Montanans with disabilities and supports independence through loans of assistive and adaptive equipment, including free help learning how to use what’s been borrowed.

This year MonTECH loaned 1,743 items to families across the state, saving over \$240,000 in equipment costs. **Some highlights:** MonTECH provided a wheelchair to a family taking their terminally-ill niece on a bucket-list road trip; supplied a communication option and all-terrain chair so a man with dementia could participate in his family reunion; and participated in a week-long speech and occupational therapy assessment for a toddler whose insurance benefits were gone.

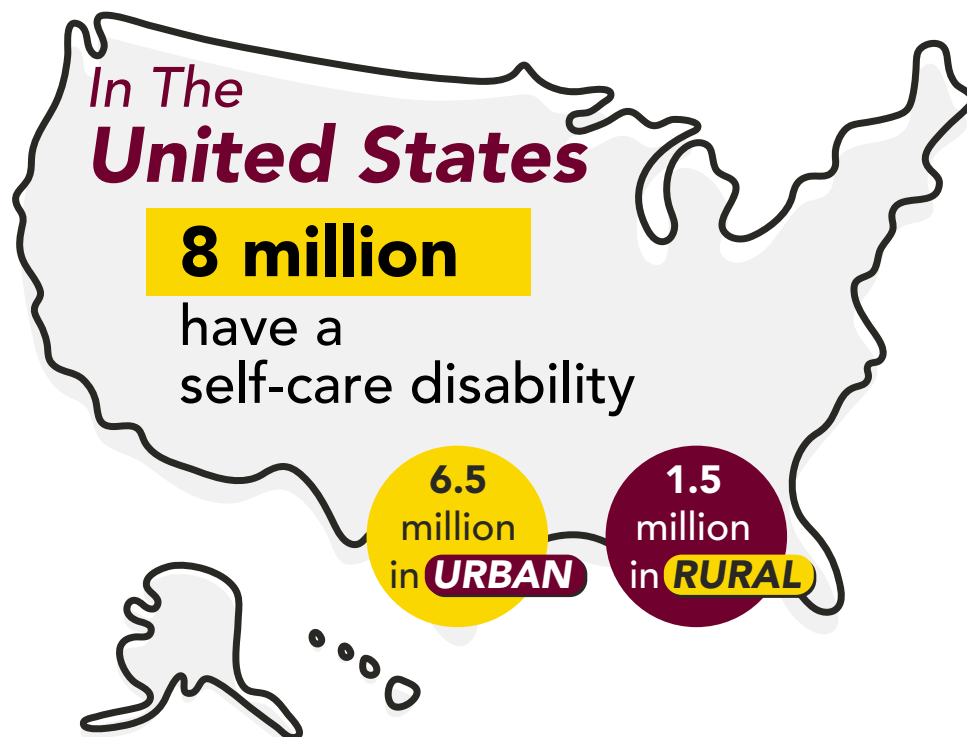


MonTECH | 3th ANNIVERSARY
IMPROVING LIVES WITH TECHNOLOGY

IMPACT ON PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

The Rural Institute collaborated with the Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care at the University of California, San Francisco on the **Rural PAS Workers Project**. The project focused on learning about the experiences of people providing and receiving Personal Assistance Services (PAS).

The project's unique story maps provide a closer look into Personal Care Aid (PCA) worker shortages and how PCA workers impact rural relationships, community life, and peoples' ability to live at home.



PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Rural Institute Core Grant

Supports disability-related education, research and services

SERVICE

MonTECH: Montana's Assistive Technology Program

Supplies technology, support, and services to improve quality of life

Montana Assistive Technology Loan (MATL) Program

Facilitates low-interest loans for assistive technology

Montana Family to Family Health Information Center

Provides family-focused healthcare information

Montana Family to Family Telehealth *

Provides telehealth equipment and support to families

Healthy Community Living

Offers independent living workshops focused on health and community living skills

Montana Disability and Health Program

Promotes health-related policy and practice initiatives

All of Us Outreach in Montana

Recruits participants for national health outcomes research

Children's Special Health Services: Montana Transition Resources

Provides transition-to-adulthood resources for youth, families, and providers

Montana: Learn the Signs. Act Early. *

Promotes early identification of developmental disabilities

Movin' On in Montana

Offers a college experience for high school students with disabilities

Montana Pediatrics School-Based Telehealth on the Fort Peck Reservation *

Provides support for, and evaluation of, virtual school-based health services

* Indicates a new program

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

UR-LEND

Provides leadership training and education focused on family-centered healthcare

National CIL and SILC Training and Technical Assistance *

Shares information and resources to support independent living nationwide

National Care Coordination Academy *

Offers technical assistance to improve care coordination for children with complex medical needs

Montana Deaf-Blind Project

Provides resources & assistance to school systems & people supporting children with deaf-blindness

NCDB: Transition Outcomes for Youth with Deaf-Blindness

Offers technical assistance to State Deaf-Blind Projects to improve transition outcomes for youth

UM OUTREACH

Trains speech language pathologists to provide service in rural and tribal communities

Center for Disease Control (CDC) /Administration Community Living (ACL) Vaccine Support *

Shares evidence-based information and support to increase COVID-19 safety measures

AUCD - CDC Vaccine Confidence (COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Project) *

Provides education to Montanans to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates

COVID-19 Community Outreach Collaborative *

Collaborates with partners to promote COVID-19 vaccination and related health safety measures

* Indicates a new program

EVALUATION

Montana Access to Pediatric Psychiatry Network (MAPP-Net)

Evaluates impact of statewide pediatric behavioral health program

Montana Obstetrics and Maternal Supports Evaluation (MOMS)

Evaluates Montana's maternal health supports

Healthy Montana Families Home Visiting Needs Assessment

Identifies home visiting program needs for pregnant women & families with children 5 and under

Montana Title V Needs Assessment

Assesses Montana's maternal and child health population needs, and the capacity to meet those needs

Montana Primary Care Office Needs Assessment

Assesses the need for, and access to, primary healthcare services across the state

School Climate Transformation: Montana Behavioral Initiative in High Need Areas

Evaluates positive behavioral interventions and supports in high-need schools

OPI Agency Capacity Assessment for System Improvement *

Improving state education agency capacity to implement multi-tiered systems of support

Montana Developmental Center Closure Evaluation Assistance *

Technical assistance to the Montana Legislative Audit Division evaluating closure of the Montana Developmental Center

RESEARCH

Home Usability Project

Promotes community participation of adults with disabilities through home modifications

Out and About

Evaluates community intervention to promote health and wellness

Partnering with Women with Disabilities to Develop a Health Information Website

Creates an online health information resource for women

Texas Model Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Systems

Evaluates ways to improve the health of people with SCI

Loneliness and Its Relation to Health in People with Spinal Cord Injury

Identifies how loneliness impacts the health of people with SCI

The Living Well in the Community App

Building an app using the Living Well with a Disability program content

Montana Pediatric Medical Passport (MP2)

Develops a family-centered app to improve collaborative healthcare decision making

Rural Community Living Development

Develops peer-to-peer training to support independent living in rural areas

Understanding Personal Assistance Services Experiences in Rural States

Explores barriers to PAS delivery, and designs an intervention to address rural outcomes

Rocky Mountain Region ADA Research

Researches ADA legal issues

Rural Youth Apprenticeship Development Project *

Promotes apprenticeship opportunities in rural communities

* Indicates a new program

The logo for RTC:Rural, featuring the text "RTC:Rural" in white on a dark red background.

Research & Training Center
on Disability in Rural Communities

RTC: RURAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER ON DISABILITY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Expanding the Availability and Quality of Rural Data

Uses existing large data sets to conduct rural analyses

Exploring Rural Disability Onset

Explores how disability evolves

Rural Access to Health Insurance and Health Care

Answers questions about health care and quality of life

Rural Resource Analysis

Maps community resources and networks

Partners for Healthy Community Living

Scales up Living Well to rural audiences

Personal Assistance Services (PAS) in Rural America

Explores and addresses rural PAS outcomes

Rural Transportation Options

Explores accessible transportation in rural communities

Rural Self-Employment

Develops and evaluates online tools for state and tribal Vocational Rehabilitation

Impacts of COVID-19

Explores COVID impacts on people with disabilities in rural and urban places

A photograph of three people (two adults and one child) standing in a field of tall grass, with their arms outstretched as if embracing the air. The image is in black and white with a yellow text overlay.

**WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE
RURAL COMMUNITY LIVING**



Rural Institute

For Inclusive Communities

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For more information and to watch a video of the 2021 Summary report, scan the QR code with your smart phone, or visit the link: RuralInstitute.org

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