The North Carolina Rural Center supports innovative, sound, and nonpartisan policy solutions to improve economic outcomes and the quality of life for our state’s rural people and places. Our advocacy platform is guided by a research initiative undertaken by the Rural Center - Forces Driving Change in Rural North Carolina - that identifies important challenges and trends in rural North Carolina. This platform highlights policies of strategic importance for rural communities, informed by unbiased research and data, and by the wisdom and expertise of the people who call rural North Carolina home.

**EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRAINING**

As the North Carolina economy becomes increasingly specialized, our state must continue to develop a trained and educated workforce to keep up with labor demand. The Rural Center believes this development starts by ensuring children have access to quality childhood education that continues into apprenticeships, community colleges, higher education institutions, and beyond.

We support lifelong learning efforts in communities that bring more rural people into the workforce. Highly trained/educated workforces attract greater economic opportunities that benefit entire communities. The Rural Center champions policies that develop highly competent workforces who live, work, and learn in rural North Carolina.

**HEALTH**

Rural communities can’t succeed without healthy populations, but data shows that rural communities tend to have worse health outcomes than urban communities. A number of factors contribute to this challenge, one of which is access to affordable, quality healthcare options. Beyond access to quality care, however, are social determinants of health that present barriers to positive health outcomes.

These include socioeconomic factors, individual behavior, and even community infrastructure. The Rural Center recognizes the need to support health outcomes of rural people throughout the state, including policies that help build the healthcare workforce, access to care, and overall healthier communities.
INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure plays a critical role in the lives of all people. It affects how we interact, learn and work, and live and play. Communities with infrastructure that is safe, modern, affordable, and resilient tend to have better economic outcomes and qualities of life. Unfortunately, data shows that many rural places have outdated infrastructure in need of maintenance or repair. Many of our rural communities also face the brunt of natural disasters, increasing the infrastructure challenges they face.

Infrastructure also includes the availability of reliable, high speed internet to connect citizens, as well as the private and public sectors, in today’s digital world. At the Rural Center, we believe that infrastructure investment is key to healthy communities. We advocate for infrastructure investments and policies that help rural places update and maintain their underlying infrastructure, and provide greater opportunity for rural growth and achievement.

SMALL BUSINESS

Small businesses are the backbone of our rural economies. Data show that small businesses provide valuable services and employment opportunities in rural places, services and opportunities that may not be available without small businesses. Entrepreneurship, innovation, and small business ownership are also associated with wealth generation and greater economic resilience.

While vital to their economies, small rural businesses face challenges that many urban small businesses do not, such as access to capital, broadband connectivity, and a limited talent pool. We advocate for legislation that prioritizes rural small business success and well-being, especially when it addresses the challenges unique to rural small businesses.

For more information, please contact Dave Kaiser, senior director of policy, advocacy and innovation at dkaiser@ncruralcenter.org, or Torie Keeton, director of policy and government affairs at tkeeton@ncruralcenter.org.