What isn't new in the report on rural health care from UnitedHealth's Center for Health Reform and Modernization are findings that rural Americans are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions and have greater difficulty accessing quality health care.

More helpful are the recommended solutions to rural health issues. Fully 30 pages are devoted to review of existing models of rural health care delivery, the promise of rural telemedicine, and new models for high-performing rural provider networks.

Specifics include: new incentives for rural primary care physicians, including making use of reformed payment models such as primary care medical homes; a bigger role for nurse practitioners and other rural health professionals; greater provider collaboration across rural areas and with urban health care systems; innovative models using mobile health clinics; faster rural uptake of electronic health records and telemedicine; designing insurance market regulation and Medicaid and exchange network adequacy rules for the needs of rural areas; and greater engagement by rural consumers in improving their health.

The report also contains the results of a May 2011 survey of physicians and consumers in rural and urban areas. Both physicians and consumers in rural areas were more likely to be believe health care in their community is not of the highest quality.

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