

## Safeguarding the health of rural educators: an urgent call for support

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**Date submitted:** 4-November-2025

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Dear Editor,

Educators in rural areas of the Philippines play a crucial role in sustaining the nation's educational system, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). These teachers often endure difficult conditions; limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to healthcare, yet they remain steadfast in their commitment to shaping the future of Filipino learners. Unfortunately, the health and well-being of rural educators have not received the necessary policy and institutional attention they deserve.

Numerous studies have highlighted the occupational stress and health risks faced by teachers, including musculoskeletal disorders, mental health issues, and burnout due to excessive workloads and role strain.<sup>1,2</sup> In rural areas, these challenges are compounded by geographic isolation, poor access to medical facilities, and additional responsibilities such as community work and multi-grade teaching.<sup>3</sup> Teachers often travel long distances through difficult terrain, exposing themselves to both physical strain and safety risks, while the scarcity of health facilities further limits preventive care and timely medical interventions.

Moreover, the Department of Education's own reports acknowledge that many rural schools lack

Citation: Montuerto R. Safeguarding the health of rural educators: an urgent call for support. *Educ Health* 2025;38:458-459

**Online access:** [www.educationforhealthjournal.org](http://www.educationforhealthjournal.org)  
DOI: 10.62694/efh.2025.520

Published by The Network: Towards Unity for Health

systematic health and wellness programs for teachers, with existing initiatives focusing primarily on students.<sup>4</sup> This neglect not only undermines teachers' personal well-being but also directly affects the quality of education they provide. Studies affirm that healthy teachers are more productive, resilient, and effective in sustaining student learning outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

To address this gap, I strongly urge the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Health, local government units, and private stakeholders, to strengthen teacher health programs in rural communities. Specific measures should include: (1) provision of regular medical check-ups and wellness monitoring for rural educators; (2) deployment of mobile health clinics and telemedicine services in GIDAs; (3) establishment of mental health support systems; and (4) inclusion of occupational health services in teacher development programs.

Safeguarding the health of rural educators is not simply a matter of welfare but a critical step toward ensuring educational equity and quality for Filipino learners. Healthy and supported teachers build stronger schools, and stronger schools lead to more resilient communities. The time to act is now.

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