

# Grant Addresses Health Concerns Among Rural Utahns | CPD Blog

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The effects of COVID-19 on mental health and employment can be seen far and wide across the country. Dr. Ty Aller, a researcher in the Research and Training division of the Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice, hopes to address these issues in rural Utah counties. Aller and his team were awarded a grant as part of the National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk. Funding for this \$500,000 grant begins July 1, 2021.

The team will focus on mitigating the effects of COVID-19 among people with disabilities and racial/ethnic minorities living in rural populations. In addition, the two-year project “[will] help strengthen public health infrastructures,” Aller said.

Fixing the public health infrastructure is not an isolated problem. “To strengthen public health infrastructures, the other systems need to be working too, which includes employment.” For this reason, Faith Thomas and Tim Riesen of the Institute for Disability will focus on solving employment problems. Aller explained that people in rural areas have suffered from job loss and lack of socializing, during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors cause an increased stress. The people that are usually affected most negatively by these issues, especially in the state of Utah, are individuals with disabilities and racial and ethnic minorities.

For Aller, the project is more profound than an assignment for work. He said, “It’s an opportunity to get connected back to our roots. I’m excited to learn more about rural Utah again. I was born and raised here. These people are my people! They’re hurting a lot.” Aller looks forwards to finding ways to benefit the communities that raised him.

During the first year of the project, a systems analysis will be run in certain rural counties in Utah. Those counties are yet to be determined. Alter explained, “You have to go talk to people and listen before you go out and do. Our hope is to go listen.” During the second year of the project, the team will develop programming to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19.

Aller hopes that the project will have enough time, resources, and energy to help people with disabilities and racial/ethnic minorities. The project also aims to develop relationships within these communities to promote ongoing collaboration throughout the coming years.

The grant will run through July of 2023.