RURAL HEALTH IN AMERICA: HOW SHIFTING POPULATIONS LEAVE BEHIND PEOPLE

The Population Continues to Shift from Rural to Urban Areas

- People are leaving rural America for urban and suburban areas
- Rural counties that gain in population are reclassified as urban
- Only 20% of Americans live in rural areas, which accounts for 97% of the land mass.

Percent of Urban & Rural Populations (1990-2010)

- Midwest Region: 72% urban, 28% rural
- Northeast Region: 79% urban, 21% rural
- South Region: 69% urban, 31% rural
- West Region: 86% urban, 14% rural

The South and Northeast saw large shifts from rural to urban populations.

As urbanization increases, an older, sicker and poorer population remains in rural America.

Rural America Has An Older, Sicker and Poorer Population

OLDER:
The median age of adults living in rural areas is greater than those living in urban areas.

RURAL: 51 years
URBAN: 45 years

18.4% of rural Americans are age 65+ versus 14.5% of urban Americans.

SICKER:
Rural areas have higher rates of several health risk factors and conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>RURAL</th>
<th>URBAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
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POOHER:
Nationally, rural households had lower median household income.

RURAL: $49,9K
URBAN: $66,1K

Below the Line
14.7% of the rural population is below the poverty line, compared to 11.3% of the urban population.
Rural Areas Have Fewer Health Care Providers

Providers by the numbers (per 10,000 people):

- Total Physicians: 13 in rural vs. 33 in urban
- Primary Care Providers: 5 in rural vs. 8 in urban
- Dentists: 4 in rural vs. 7 in urban

Over 1/2 of rural counties have no hospital-based obstetrics services.

6% of the nation’s OB–GYNs work in rural areas.

Many rural communities have lost their hospitals:

- 113 rural hospital closures

54% of rural voters say access to medical specialists is a problem in their local community, whereas...

33% of urban voters say it is a problem.

Initiatives Are Responding to Rural Health Challenges

Expanding medical workforce through local, state and national efforts:

- Rural Residency Programs
- Scope of Practice Laws
- National Health Service Corps
- Alternative Community Providers (EMS, pharmacist, doula)
- Federally Qualified, Community & Rural Health Centers

Expanding access to providers, including specialists, through technology:

- Telehealth mitigates distance challenges by connecting:
  - Patients to providers
  - Local providers to outside specialists
- Investments in broadband access enable telehealth use:
  - An estimated 20 million Americans lack broadband access – and most live in rural communities
  - Some studies suggest the number could be higher
  - The connectivity gap is expected to grow as technology evolves

25% of rural Americans already use telehealth services

Purdue and citations go to:

25 years of NIHCM