

Disparities in Rural Areas

access advocacy
african american bone
asian american bone
density cancer children
cardiovascular
cholesterol chronic
disease churches
collaboration community
cultural competence
DIABETES diet disability
disparities
diversity education
environment evaluation
ethnicity exposure faith
community financial
need goals grassroots
health insurance
healthcare providers
heart disease higher
rates healthy hispanic
american hypertension
HIV/AIDS insurance
infant mortality
initiative intervention
language barriers LEAD
life expectancy lifestyle
low birthweight
literacy malnutrition
medicare/medicaid men
mental health native
american nutrition
obesity partnership
overweight pollution
prenatal prescription
drugs prevention quality
of care race risk factors
RURAL schools self-
esteem socioeconomics
solutions stereotypes
surveillance technology
teenagers tobacco
tracking transportation
treatment TRUST urban
underutilization
unequal care under-
representation
violence vaccinations
water quality welfare policy
women wellness white
workplace diversity

Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural areas. Rural communities have higher rates of chronic illness and disability and poorer overall health status than urban communities.³

Rural residents tend to be older and poorer than urban residents

- **Age.** Eighteen percent of rural residents are over 65 compared to 15 percent of urban residents.⁴
- **Income level.** Sixty-nine percent of rural residents live below the poverty level compared to 61 percent of urban residents.³ Rural communities have a disproportionately higher percentage of Medicare beneficiaries.²

Rural residents have more health issues

- Rural elders are more often disabled and diagnosed with more severe occupation-related illnesses than those found among urban residents.⁴
- Chronic conditions are more prevalent in rural areas.⁴
- Injury-related deaths are 40 percent higher in rural communities than in urban communities.⁵
- Heart disease, cancer and diabetes rates are higher in rural areas.⁵
- People living in rural areas are less likely to use preventive screening services, exercise regularly or wear safety belts.⁵

Some potential reasons for disparities in rural areas

- **Transportation.** Many individuals lack access to treatment because appropriate transportation is too expensive, limited by weather factors, or because the patient is too sick to use the options that are available.⁶
- **Lack of physicians.** Residents of rural areas have less contact and fewer visits with physicians.³

Although 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas, only 9 percent of the nation's physicians practice in rural areas.¹ Only 10 percent of specialists practice in rural areas.⁴

- **Lack of services.** Most of the "frontier counties" have limited health care services and some have none at all.¹ Many rural hospitals have negative operating margins and, from 1984 to 1997, over 500 rural hospitals closed.⁴
- **Limited services.** Rural residents are more likely to report that their provider does not have office hours at night or on weekends.¹
- **Insurance.** One study found that almost 20 percent of rural residents were uninsured compared with 16 percent of urban residents.² Rural residents under 65 are disproportionately uninsured.¹
- **Income.** Among urban residents, the percent of high-risk people ages 18 to 64 who had influenza vaccination in the past year is similar across income groups. Among rural residents, higher income people are significantly more likely to have had the vaccination.¹

1. "National Healthcare Disparities Report," US Dept Health and Human Services, December 2003, Prepublication Copy.
2. "Factors Affecting Health Disparities in Rural Areas," Elizabeth Embser Wattenberg, M.C.S.A, Health Care Disparities in Western New York, November 30, 2000.
3. "Rural Poor and the Medically Underserved & Cancer," Intercultural Cancer Council, <http://iccnetwork.org/cancerfacts/ICC-CFS6.pdf>
4. "Center for Rural Care Health Care Fact Sheet," Center for Rural Health, University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, January 27, 2003.
5. "Healthy People 2010, An Overview" www.healthypeople.gov.
6. <http://crchd.nci.nih.gov/chd/barriers.html>

