

The Realities of Behavioral Health in Rural Communities

While behavioral health disorders and workforce shortages exist in almost all communities, rural communities often have unique circumstances that exacerbate the challenges to accessing behavioral health care, such as sparsely populated areas isolated from population centers and services, as well as limited access to broadband internet and public transportation.

OVER 12 MILLION

rural adults suffer from a behavioral health concern.

Source: Andrilla CHA, Woolcock SC, Garberson LA, Patterson DG. Changes in the Supply and Rural-Urban Distribution of Selected Behavioral Health Providers. WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington, Oct. 2022. <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/rhrc/publications/changes-in-the-supply-and-rural-urban-distribution-of-selected-behavioral-health-providers/>

For two decades, suicide rates have been consistently higher in rural America.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/rural-health/php/public-health-strategy/suicide-in-rural-america-prevention-strategies.html#:~:text=In%20the%20past%20two%20decades,to%2027.3%25%20in%20metro%20areas>

61%

of mental health professional shortage areas are rural or partially rural.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/rural-health/php/public-health-strategy/strategies-for-child-health-policy-brief.html>

Rural adults have higher rates of use for tobacco and methamphetamines.

Source: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/substance-use>

65%

of rural counties do not have a psychiatrist.

Source: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.01.004>

70%

of rural counties have no child and adolescent psychiatrists.

Source: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Policy_Statements/2023/Behavioral_Healthcare_Workforce_Shortage.aspx

How Hospitals and Health Systems Can Support Behavioral Health in Rural Communities

- Integrate behavioral health services with primary care services.
- Have open discussions about behavioral health to reduce the stigma of seeking support.
- Expand offerings of telehealth services for behavioral health.
- Explore partnerships with community organizations such as schools, nonprofits and other non-hospital health care providers offering behavioral health services.
- Collaborate with regional health care systems to expand access to behavioral health services.
- Support public policies that bolster health care education and recruitment to rural areas, such as grants, loans, fellowships, scholarships, state loan repayment/forgiveness or scholarship programs, faculty loan repayment programs and other incentives.

Source: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/health-care-workforce>



Explore our resources to learn more about how AHA members support the behavioral health of their community members.