

Preventing Chronic Diseases and Promoting Health in Rural Communities

Chronic diseases are the leading causes of death and disability in America, and they affect some populations more than others. People who live in rural areas, for example, are more likely than urban residents to die prematurely from all of the five leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury, chronic lower respiratory disease, and stroke. These rural health disparities have many causes:

- **Health Behaviors:** Rural residents often have limited access to healthy foods and fewer opportunities to be physically active compared to their urban counterparts, which can lead to conditions such as obesity and high blood pressure. Rural residents also have higher rates of smoking, which increases the risk of many chronic diseases.
- **Health Care Access:** Rural counties have fewer health care workers, specialists (such as cancer doctors), critical care units, emergency facilities, and transportation options. Residents are also more likely to be uninsured and to live farther away from health services.
- **Healthy Food Access:** National and local studies suggest that residents of low-income, minority, and rural neighborhoods often have less access to supermarkets and healthy foods.
- **Demographic Characteristics:** Residents of rural areas tend to be older, with lower incomes and less education than their urban counterparts. These factors are linked to poorer health.

About 46 million Americans—15% of the US population—live in rural areas. CDC's [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#) works to improve health in these areas by:

- Measuring how many Americans have chronic diseases or chronic disease risk factors and reporting data down to the county level.
- Studying and reporting on rural health disparities and innovative programs to reduce those disparities.
- Funding and guiding states, territories, and tribes to reach rural populations through proven interventions and innovative programs.
- Developing programs and promoting care through digital formats, such as online classes or “telehealth” approaches that reduce barriers to health care access for rural residents.

Compared to urban areas, rural areas have:



higher rates of unhealthy behaviors



less access to health care



less access to healthy foods

These factors contribute to higher rates of premature death from the five leading causes of death.



CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion prevents chronic disease and promotes health for people of all ages.



IMPROVING
QUALITY OF LIFE

INCREASING HEALTHY
LIFE EXPECTANCY

REDUCING HEALTH
CARE COSTS

We Work to Improve Health Across the Life Span

Where People Live, Learn, Work, and Play



Infants

Reduce the leading causes of infant death and illness.



Children and Adolescents

Help support healthy communities, child care programs, and schools so children can eat well, stay active, and avoid risky behaviors.



Adults

Help adults lead healthy and active lives and increase the use of preventive services like cancer screenings.



Older Adults

Promote quality of life and independence for people as they age.

For more information, contact

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#)
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636); TTY 1-888-232-6348
Contact [CDC-INFO](#)