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Obesity in Rural America

Obesity is a chronic disease that impacts millions of Americans, but it is more prevalent in rural populations. Approximately 48% of adults in non-metropolitan areas live with obesity.¹ Improving access to obesity care in rural areas will improve quality of life for many Americans.

Barriers to Obesity Treatment

For people living in rural areas, distance can be a barrier to the care and treatment of obesity. Many people live far from clinics where they can meet regularly with primary care clinicians and specialists. Several rural areas are designated “Health Professional Shortage Areas” due to their lack of clinicians.²

Older adults living in rural areas are more likely to develop obesity, yet there is a negative connotation surrounding the disease.³ This stigma may lead patients to avoid seeking treatment.

Additionally, people living in rural areas may not have reliable internet access or insurance. This gap ultimately limits their access to obesity-related clinicians and treatments.

Obesity and Related Conditions

People living with obesity can often develop other chronic diseases. They are at risk for developing cancers, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, musculoskeletal disorders and more. These comorbidities (related conditions) intensify the need for access to obesity care in rural areas.

Policymakers' Responsibility

Policymakers and advocates can work together to bridge the gap in obesity health care by:



Expanding telehealth services



Expanding Medicaid and Medicare coverage for obesity treatment



Encouraging routine screenings for obesity and obesity-related diseases.

Obesity is a chronic disease that requires tailored treatment and access to care, **no matter where patients live.**

1. Adult Obesity in Rural America | NORC at the University of Chicago. www.norc.org. <https://www.norc.org/research/projects/adult-obesity-in-rural-america.html>
2. Arredondo K, Touchett HN, Khan S, Vincenti M, Watts BV. Current programs and incentives to overcome rural physician shortages in the United States: A narrative review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2023;38(3):916-922. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-023-08122-6>
3. Coughlin SS, Clary C, Johnson JA, et al. Continuing Challenges in Rural Health in the United States. *J Environ Health Sci*. 2019;5(2):90-92.



Alliance for Patient Access

The Alliance for Patient Access is a national network of policy-minded health care providers advocating for patient-centered care.

AllianceforPatientAccess.org

