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Rural Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities

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Scope of the Problem

About how many rural households do not have access to a personal vehicle?

Scope of the Problem

About how many rural households do not have access to a personal vehicle?

– *A: Two million (4%)*

Sources:

USDA Economic Research Service. Rural Transportation at a Glance. 2005.

Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Highlights of the 2001 National Household Travel Survey: Household, Individual, and Vehicle Characteristics. 2003. <http://bit.ly/2zbr9r2>

Transportation Impacts Health

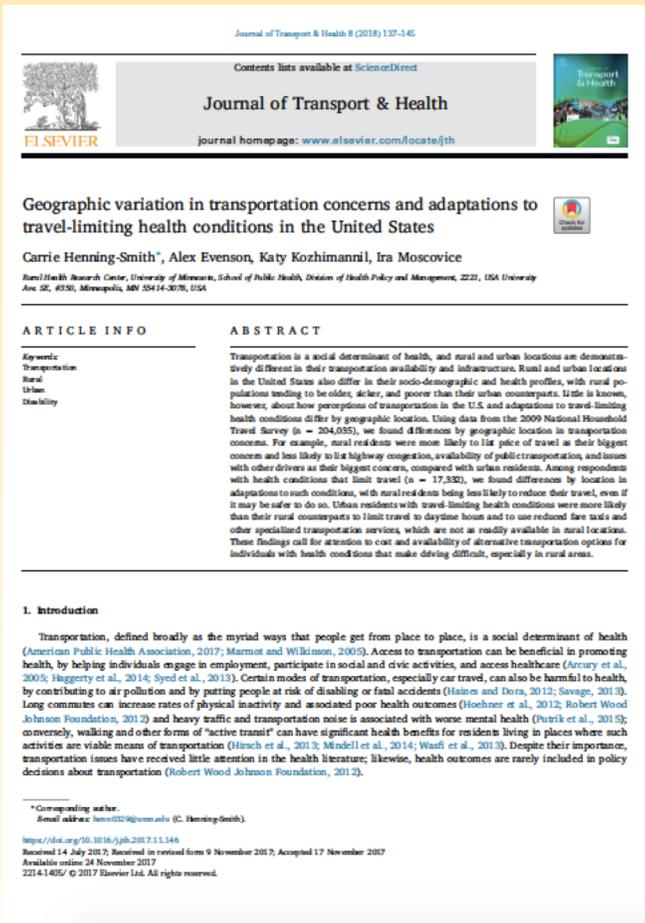
- Driver's license?
 - 2.3 times more health visits for chronic care
 - 1.9 times more health visits for regular checkups
- Family or friends to drive?
 - 1.6 times more visits for chronic care.

Arcury T, Preisser J, Gesler W, Powers J. Access to transportation and health care utilization in a rural region. *Journal of Rural Health*, 2005; 21(1):31-38.

Background & Policy Context

- Rural communities are much less likely to have access to public transportation.
- Medicaid provides medical transportation to eligible individuals.
 - “Loaded Miles” policy only reimburses when beneficiary is in vehicle
- Federal Transit Administration programs offer funding matching opportunities for public transportation for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and rural areas.
 - Requires partial state funding; programs vary by state

Journal Article: National Survey Data



- Purpose: to identify any significant differences between the ways rural and urban residents cope with travel-limiting health conditions
- Used 2009 National Household Travel Survey: N=204,035 people who answered all transportation questions and were age 18+

Citation

- Henning-Smith C, Evenson A, Kozhimannil K, Moscovice I. Geographic variation in transportation concerns and adaptations to travel-limiting health conditions in the US. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 8(2018), 137-145. doi: 10.1016/j.jth.2017.11.146

Research Questions

- Are there differences by rural-urban location in:
 - the prevalence of travel-limiting health conditions?
 - the response or adaptation to those conditions?
 - in perceptions of transportation concerns?

Key Findings

- 17,332 people in sample had health conditions that make driving difficult: 6% urban, 6% rural non-core, 8% micropolitan.
- Rural residents significantly less likely to limit travel to daytime hours or reduce overall amount of travel
- Rural residents more than 15 percentage points more likely than urban to identify “price of travel” as the most important transportation issue.

Policy Brief: Results from 113 Interviews

POLICY BRIEF
November 2017



Rural Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities

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Purpose

Transportation, as it relates to health and health care, is widely acknowledged to have unique features in rural communities, but there is limited research on specific challenges and potential policy interventions to alleviate them. This policy brief uses survey data from 113 key informants across all fifty states to describe challenges and opportunities related to rural transportation.

Background and Policy Context

Transportation has long been cited as a concern for rural residents, but is rarely the focus of health services research.¹ As a social determinant of health, access to high-quality, affordable transportation is fundamental to mental, physical, and emotional well-being. For individuals with disabilities, those with low incomes, older adults, and others who may not have reliable access to a vehicle or be able to safely drive themselves, public and private transportation is critical to access health services, obtain food and other necessities, and engage with their communities.² Medicaid is currently an important source of transportation for individuals who qualify, providing emergency and non-emergency medical transportation. However, exact benefits vary by state, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services only permit reimbursement for "loaded" miles in which the beneficiary is in the vehicle.³ This puts rural transportation providers at a distinct disadvantage, since they need to bear the burden of driving more un-reimbursed miles to pick up a passenger. The Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 and 5311 programs are also important sources of transportation assistance in rural areas, providing federal matching dollars for public transportation for individuals with disabilities and rural areas, respectively.⁴ However, these also rely on some funding and coordination at the state level, leading to disparities in access to and quality of transportation programs by state, and they alone may not be sufficient to address all rural transportation challenges.

In both rural and urban settings, transportation clearly impacts the usage of health care services, because individuals without reliable transportation are more likely to delay and forgo necessary appointments, preventive care, and health maintenance activities.⁵ A study of more than 1,000 households in North Carolina found that those with a driver's license had 2.3 times more health visits for chronic care and 1.9 times more visits for regular checkup care than those who did not have a driver's license, and those who had family or friends who could

Key Findings

- 113 key informants from all fifty states reported rural transportation challenges across six distinct, interrelated themes: infrastructure (mentioned by 53%), geography (46%), funding (27%), accessibility (27%), political support and public awareness (19%), and socio-demographics (11%).
- Most key informants highlighted problems across multiple themes, illustrating the complexity of meeting the transportation needs of rural residents.
- Improving rural access to transportation services is, in the opinion of nearly all key informants, an area of critical importance to rural populations.
- Policy interventions should aim to improve awareness of existing transportation services; address accessibility for all riders; share best practices between states, communities, and health care facilities to improve efficiency; and build partnerships that cross traditional organizational and sector boundary lines.

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- Purpose: to identify pervasive challenges and opportunities related to rural transportation
- Survey of 100+ key informants across all 50 states:
 - State Offices of Rural Health
 - Aging & Disability Resource Centers
 - Area Agencies on Aging

Survey Questions Used for Analysis

1. What rural transportation issues are unique to your state?
2. Do you foresee these issues changing in next five years?

Results: Six Themes

1. Infrastructure (63%)
2. Geography (46%)
3. Funding (27%)
4. Accessibility (27%)
5. Political Support and Public Awareness (19%)
6. Socio-Demographics (11%)

Theme 1: Infrastructure (63%)

- *“People needing to go to out of town appointments have to rely on volunteers. Volunteers aren’t plentiful & when available aren’t always willing to drive 2 hours to Seattle (for instance).” –WA*
- *“Local governments provide basically no transportation or cab service in our rural areas.” – VA*
- *“The ruralness of the area and the small numbers of people make it difficult to sustain programs.” – OK*
- *“Half of Alaska lives in rural Alaska, many in small villages with no organized transportation systems. Many folks don’t have cars and get around on ATV’s.” – AK*

Theme 2: Geography (46%)

- *“Many, many isolated, very small frontier communities. – WY*
- *“There are many places that a bus just can’t feasibly drive; [in winter] the mountainous back roads are just too dangerous.” – KY*
- *“Close to 90% of our state’s population lives in a mountainous area. Getting from point A to point B, even if it is a short distance in mileage, can take twice as long due to the winding, twisting mountainous terrain”. – WV*
- *“During certain high tourist times, traffic can get very bad in certain rural areas, making even short trips last much longer than expected.” – HI*

Theme 3: Funding (27%)

- *“Funding is a primary barrier– rural service is inherently expensive – large geographic coverages, miles and low productivity.” – OR*
- *“Fuel tax and registration fees are insufficient to provide for maintaining a robust infrastructure, let alone anything for expansion of transit programs. The state has resorted to heavy borrowing which leaves less money available in the segregated fund.” – WI*
- *“The state of Maine has reduced or eliminated reimbursement and funding for transportation services due to budget cuts to the Office of MaineCare Services.” – ME*

Theme 4: Accessibility (27%)

- *“The biggest challenges ... are having transportation routes that accommodate the individual’s physical limitations, time restraints, and needs (such as needing to be at the pharmacy in the AM, doctor visit at noon, and senior center for dinner at 5pm before getting home).” – VT*
- *“Very often they begin their ride an hour before the actual appointment.” – CT*
- *“A lot of people are not able to get on the [public transportation] bus, because they have a wheelchair or need help walking from their door to the bus.” – IA*

Theme 5: Political Support & Public Awareness (19%)

- *“The Rural Transit System has multiple regions and drivers are not allowed to cross regional borders. While the regions are cooperative with each other and work to arrange inter-regional transportation, it is difficult to coordinate transfers between regions.” – TX*
- *“It’s hard to connect people between towns. While we have lots of transportation options that will drive people within towns, we only have two programs that will take people from one town to another.” – AZ*
- *“The challenges include the lack of transportation outside of parish lines so those in rural areas have a very hard time finding transportation to medical appointments outside of their parish.” – LA*
- *“Callers constantly express frustration regarding the limited route opportunities and the expensive costs charged when traveling from county to county.” – MS*

Theme 6: Socio-demographics, Culture (11%)

- *“One of the greatest challenges to Alaska transportation is the insular nature of our communities.” – AK*
- *“Approximately one-third of the state’s land area is American Indian Reservation land. Because these counties are among the poorest in the nation, they also have a high percentage of people who do not own vehicles.” – SD*
- *“Arkansas is a poor state ... obtaining some type of transportation with costs involved to the individual would not be an option for most older adults and individuals with disabilities residing in rural areas.” – AK*
- *“People do not like to ask for help; pride is a barrier.” – MI*

Proposed Policy Solutions from Interviews

- Use vehicles across programs
 - school buses to deliver meals during the day or summer
- Volunteers
- Telemedicine
- Broaden reach of new technologies
 - Ride-sharing service
 - Driverless cars

Policy Recommendations

- Change the transportation conversation from one of convenience to one of necessity
- Identify best practices for communicating with potential users
- Re-evaluate boundary policies
- Cultivate non-traditional partnerships
- Create tracking system for new and adapted transportation models

Questions and Discussion



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