

THE RURAL MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

People living in rural areas – places not near cities and with small populations and large, open land areas – are confronted with unique challenges when it comes to caring for their mental health.

RURAL LIFESTYLE CHALLENGES

Fear of negative judgment by family, friends, and community members for appearing weak or unable to deal with life's ups and downs is just one of the many challenges that keep people from seeking help in rural areas. As members of small, close-knit communities, many rural individuals are also often concerned about a lack of privacy about their mental health conditions.

Additional factors that impact mental health in rural America include:

- Shortages of mental health providers, meaning rural residents typically must travel long distances to receive mental health services.
- Limited access to affordable, reliable broadband internet, which reduces the ability to search for help and information and telehealth availability are affected.
- Lack of adequate insurance to cover the costs of mental health services.
- Stress factors that are unique to rural life, including a weakening agricultural economy, financial instability, and solitary lifestyle.

ENDING THE STIGMA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The stigma associated with mental health conditions is a major barrier to seeking help for many individuals in rural communities. Although mental health is important to overall health, some people don't recognize mental health conditions as valid health issues. This type of thinking is often more common in rural communities, where a mental health condition can be seen as a personal weakness or character flaw, which adds shame to the struggles of someone already dealing with a mental health condition.

Understanding that mental health conditions are valid health issues – just like cancer or diabetes – is one step towards eliminating the stigma in rural communities. In addition, talking openly with others about lived experiences with mental health conditions, as well as providing support to those who are struggling, are essential to breaking down the mental health stigma.

MORE INFORMATION

- Access information about rural mental health and available resources at ruralminds.org.
- Explore options for care at mhanational.org/get-help.
- Take a mental health screen at mhascreening.org to determine if you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.
- If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

QUICK FACTS

RURAL AREAS HAVE 20% FEWER PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS THAN URBAN AREAS.¹

65% OF RURAL COUNTIES DO NOT HAVE A PSYCHIATRIST AND 81% DO NOT HAVE A PSYCHIATRIC NURSE PRACTITIONER.²

RURAL RESIDENTS ARE LESS LIKELY THAN THOSE LIVING IN SUBURBAN AREAS TO HAVE HOME BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS, AND ROUGHLY 3 IN 10 RURAL AMERICANS (28%) SAY THEY DO NOT HAVE A BROADBAND INTERNET CONNECTION AT HOME.³

IN RURAL COMMUNITIES, THE SUICIDE RATE IS BETWEEN 18.3 AND 20.5 PER 100,000 RESIDENTS, COMPARED TO LARGE URBAN COMMUNITIES WHERE THE RATE IS BETWEEN 10.9 AND 12.5 PER 100,000.⁴

Sources

¹Zhang, D., Son, H., Shen, Y., et al. (October 28, 2020). JAMA Assessment of Changes in Rural and Urban Primary Care Workforce in the United States From 2009 to 2017. Retrieved from, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2772305>

²Andrilla, C. H. A., Patterson, D. G., Garberson, L. A., Coulthard, C., & Larson, E. H. (2018). Geographic variation in the supply of selected behavioral health providers. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 54(6, Suppl 3), S199–S207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.01.004>

³Vogels, E. (August 19, 2021). Some digital divides persist between rural, urban and suburban America. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/19/some-digital-divides-persist-between-rural-urban-and-suburban-america/>

⁴Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Disparities in Suicide. Retrieved from, <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html>