

OCRH Series on Rural-Urban Disparities, WA

Age Matters: Who Lives in Rural Washington?

Facts:

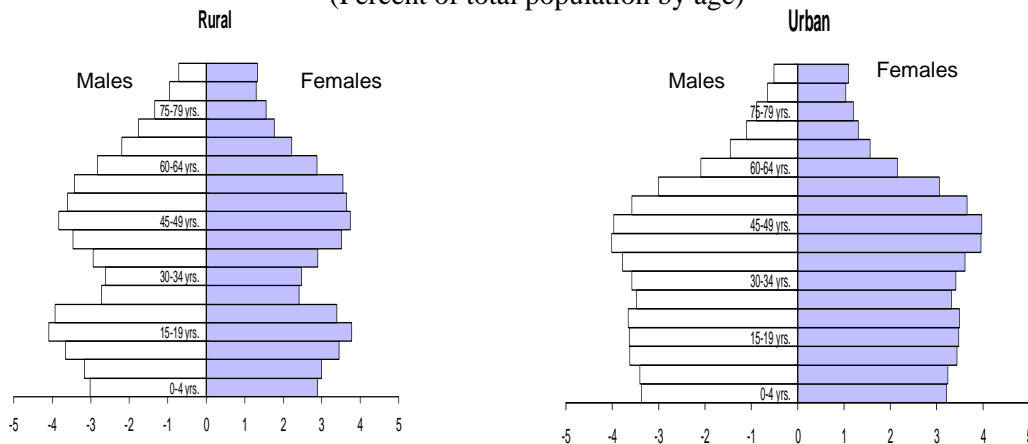
Rural Populations are both younger and older, with fewer in the middle:

- **Older** with a median age of 40 years vs. 36 in urban counties.
- **More likely to be Medicare eligible.** Population over age 65 is 15% vs. 11% in urban counties.
- **Younger.** Rural population between age 15-24 is 15% vs. 14% in urban counties.
- **Fewer Working age residents.** Working-age population between age 25-64 is 51% vs. 55% in urban counties.

Comparison of age groups in rural and urban Washington State, 2005 (%)

Age groups	Rural	Urban
Children (age 0-14)	19	20
Young adults (age 15-24)	15	14
Working age adults (age 25-64)	51	55
Retired and elderly (age 65+)	15	11
Total population	100	100

Population Pyramids for Rural and Urban Counties, 2005 (Percent of total population by age)



Rural Policy Implications:

- We need to design services for a rural population that is both younger and older than average for the state.
- Older populations tend to use specialty care more.¹
- Reproductive health services are needed for young adults—age 15 to 24.
- Lack of working age adults means fewer employment-financed options for rural healthcare services. Health services in rural counties depend heavily on federal and state subsidies.

Population size—Washington: 6,245,066; Rural: 772,016; Urban: 5,473,050.

¹ Starfield et al. (2005) "Comorbidity and the Use of Primary Care and and Specialist Care in the Elderly." *Annals of Family Medicine*. Vol. 3. No. 3.

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