

OCRH Series on Rural-Urban Disparities, WA

Rural Disparities in Mortality

Facts:

A recent Department of Health study using 2007-2008 death data found that rural residents have a higher risk of preventable deaths than urban residents. Age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 population are:

- 713 in urban areas.
- 774 in large town rural areas.
- 762 in small town/isolated rural areas.

In Washington State, the ten leading causes of death are cancer, heart disease, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, unintentional injury, Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, influenza and pneumonia, suicide, and liver disease. The study looked at whether these leading causes of death occur differently in rural and urban areas.

Large rural towns and Small Town Isolated Areas each have higher disease specific death rates for five out of ten causes (statistically significant difference $p < 0.05$).

The highest death rates for heart disease and chronic lower respiratory disease are in large rural towns. Small town and isolated rural areas have the highest rates for cancer, unintentional injuries, and suicides.

Policy Implications:

Top Priorities – Focusing on deaths in rural areas due to heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury, and suicide will bring the highest returns. The rural-urban disparity is greatest for these.

Community Focus – To close the rural-urban mortality gap, programs with a rural focus are necessary. Community-based activities that strengthen health prevention as well as health-care systems would be beneficial.

Fast Response – Preventing death and disability from heart disease, unintentional injury, and suicide will also require a strong network of patient referral and transport, since timely medical intervention is critical to save lives.

Ten Leading Causes of Death in Washington State

Age-Adjusted Rates per 100,000 Population by Rural-Urban Location of Residence, 2007-2008

	Urban <i>(CI)</i>	Large Rural Town <i>(CI)</i>	Small Town/ Isolated Rural <i>(CI)</i>
Cancer	173 <i>(170-176)</i>	186 <i>(178-195)</i>	191 <i>(182-199)</i>
Heart Disease	159 <i>(157-162)</i>	181 <i>(173-189)</i>	175 <i>(167-183)</i>
Stroke	40 <i>(39-42)</i>	44 <i>(40-48)</i>	45 <i>(41-50)</i>
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	43 <i>(42-44)</i>	50 <i>(46-55)</i>	44 <i>(40-49)</i>
Unintentional Injury (Accident)	37 <i>(43-50)</i>	46 <i>(42-51)</i>	58 <i>(53-64)</i>
Alzheimer’s Disease	44 <i>(43-46)</i>	42 <i>(39-46)</i>	31 <i>(28-35)</i>
Diabetes	24 <i>(23-25)</i>	25 <i>(22-28)</i>	25 <i>(22-29)</i>
Flu and Pneumonia	11 <i>(10-12)</i>	11 <i>(9-14)</i>	15 <i>(12-17)</i>
Intentional Self-Harm (Suicide)	12 <i>(12-13)</i>	15 <i>(12-18)</i>	16 <i>(14-19)</i>
Liver Disease	9 <i>(9-10)</i>	11 <i>(9-14)</i>	10 <i>(8-12)</i>

 Worse than urban areas (Statistically significant difference $p < 0.05$)

Data Source: Washington State Department of Health, Death Certificates
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