

**OCRH Series on Rural-Urban Disparities, WA**

**Rural Disparities in Mortality**

**Facts:**

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

- 748 in urban areas.
- 794 in large town rural areas.
- 784 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.

Rural areas have higher disease specific death rates for six out of ten causes (statistically significant difference  $p < 0.05$ ).

The highest death rates for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and flu and pneumonia are in large town rural areas.

**Policy Implications:**

**Top Priorities** – Focusing on deaths in rural areas due to heart disease, 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, 2002-2006

	Urban <i>(CI)</i>	Large Town Rural <i>(CI)</i>	Small Town/ Isolated Rural <i>(CI)</i>
<b>Cancer</b>	183 <i>(±2)</i>	187 <i>(±5)</i>	189 <i>(±5)</i>
<b>Heart Disease</b>	178 <i>(±2)</i>	190 <i>(±5)</i>	187 <i>(±5)</i>
<b>Stroke</b>	53 <i>(±1)</i>	60 <i>(±3)</i>	55 <i>(±3)</i>
<b>Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease</b>	45 <i>(±1)</i>	45 <i>(±3)</i>	47 <i>(±4)</i>
<b>Unintentional Injury or Accident</b>	36 <i>(±1)</i>	45 <i>(±3)</i>	60 <i>(±4)</i>
<b>Alzheimer’s Disease</b>	39 <i>(±1)</i>	38 <i>(±2)</i>	29 <i>(±2)</i>
<b>Diabetes</b>	25 <i>(±1)</i>	29 <i>(±2)</i>	27 <i>(±2)</i>
<b>Flu and Pneumonia</b>	14 <i>(±1)</i>	17 <i>(±2)</i>	16 <i>(±2)</i>
<b>Intentional Self- Harm (Suicide)</b>	12 <i>(±1)</i>	15 <i>(±2)</i>	17 <i>(±2)</i>
<b>Liver Disease</b>	9 <i>(±1)</i>	10 <i>(±1)</i>	11 <i>(±1)</i>

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

Data Source: Washington State Department of Health, Death Certificates  
 For more information, contact Zeynep Shorter Telephone: (360) 236-2806 Email: [Zeynep.Shorter@doh.wa.gov](mailto:Zeynep.Shorter@doh.wa.gov)

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