

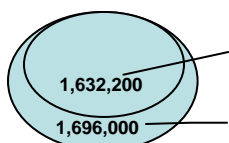
OCRH Series on Rural-Urban Disparities, WA

How Many Agencies does it Take to Define Rural?

Defining Rural:

There is no single, universally accepted definition for rural. Below are four of the most commonly used state and federal definitions.

- **WA State Office of Financial Management (OFM):** Any county with a population density under 100 persons/mile².
- **US Census Bureau:** All territory located *outside* of urbanized areas and urban clusters.
Urbanized Areas: Core census blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people/mile².
Urban Clusters: Census blocks adjacent to the core that have an overall density of at least 500 people/mile².
- **US Office of Management and Budget (OMB):** All counties *outside* of Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
- **US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS):** Uses the Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes developed by the US Department of Agriculture. Codes are based on commute data in relation to urbanized areas and urban clusters (Census Bureau). Among the 10 primary codes those numbered 4 to 10 identify rural areas within Metropolitan Statistical Areas.



Rural Washington population as defined by the OMB definition

Rural Washington population as defined by the OFM definition

Rural-Urban Definitions Used by Major Grant Programs of the Office of Community and Rural Health

| | Geography of the Application | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|------------------|---------|
| | County | | Sub-County | |
| Programs/ Grants | WA OFM | US OMB | US Census Bureau | US DHHS |
| Rural Health Clinics | | | X | |
| Small Hospital Improvement Grant | X | X | | X |
| Health Systems Resources Grants* | | X | | |
| Advanced Skills Training | | | | X |
| Critical Access Hospital Program | X | X | | X |

* New definition under consideration

Policy Implications:

- When choosing a rural definition, it is important to consider:
 - The nature of the problem we are addressing.
 - Who or what kind of facilities we are targeting.
 - Where the facilities are located—e.g., whether they are in rural areas within large metropolitan counties or in rural counties.
- Rural designations can change with shifts in population distribution, commuting patterns, or geographic boundaries. Hence, periodic updates are necessary.
- Different rural definitions have distinct consequences. For example, the OMB definition is only a subset of the OFM definition.

Metropolitan—more than 50,000 inhabitants
For more information, contact Zeynep Shorter

Micropolitan—10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants
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