

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 for rural programs.

- **Rural Distressed Counties (OFM):** Any county with a population density under 100 persons/mile².
- **Metropolitan, Micropolitan, Outside Core Based Statistical Area (OMB):** All counties outside of Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
- **Urbanized Areas (US Census Bureau):** Rural is any location outside of Urbanized Areas. Urbanized areas are contiguous built-up areas with a population density of more than 1,000 persons/mile².
- **Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes (RUCA) (WWAMI Rural Research Center and USDA):** The RUCA system is a ten-tiered classification system that uses US Census Bureau definition of Urbanized Areas and commuting relationships at the census tract and zip code levels as the basic building blocks. Some federal programs have identified areas with a RUCA code of four and above as rural.

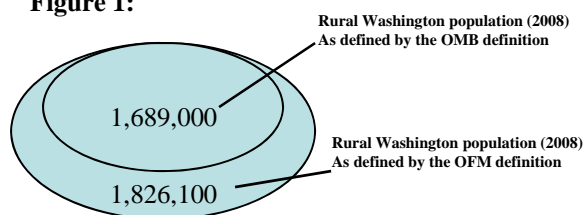
Rural-Urban Definitions Used by Major Grant Programs of the Community Health Systems

	Geography of the Application			
	County		Sub-County	
Programs/Grants	Rural Distressed	Outside of Metropolitan Statistical Areas	Outside of Urbanized Areas	RUCA
Rural Health Clinics			X	
Small Hospital Improvement Grant	X	X		X
Health Systems Resources Grants			X	
Critical Access Hospital Flexibility Program		X		X

Further Considerations:

- 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 (Figure 1).

Figure 1:



OFM: Washington State Office of Financial Management; OMB: United States Office of Management and Budget. WWAMI: Washington State, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho; USDA: United States Department of Agriculture. For more information on rural definitions, see <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Data/guidelines/RuralUrban1.htm>

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