

Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

January/February 2003

About Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

This fact sheet is the first in a series of nine to examine trends in rural Pennsylvania. Each fact sheet will focus on a specific area of interest, and is based on the mandates outlined in the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's enabling legislation (Act 16 of 1987). The areas of interest are agriculture, economic development, local government capacity and fiscal stress indicators, transportation, sociodemographics, health care and human services, the environment and natural resources, education and the condition of existing local infrastructure.

For more information on any of the data presented, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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Health Care Access and Affordability

The health care delivery system is important to the overall economic and community viability of rural Pennsylvania. Integral to this system is the availability of health care professionals and the affordability of services. Over the past few years, personnel shortages and insurance costs have been important topics for discussion. Even today, the impact of nursing shortages and malpractice insurance on health care availability and accessibility has yet to be determined.

To better understand some of the issues, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania analyzed data on health care providers and health insurance participation rates. The analysis shows a slight increase in the number of medical personnel over the last decade and a slight increase in health insurance participation rates.

Since 1994, for example, there has been a 15 percent increase in the per capita number of rural doctors, and health insurance participation rates throughout Pennsylvania increased about 3 percentage points.

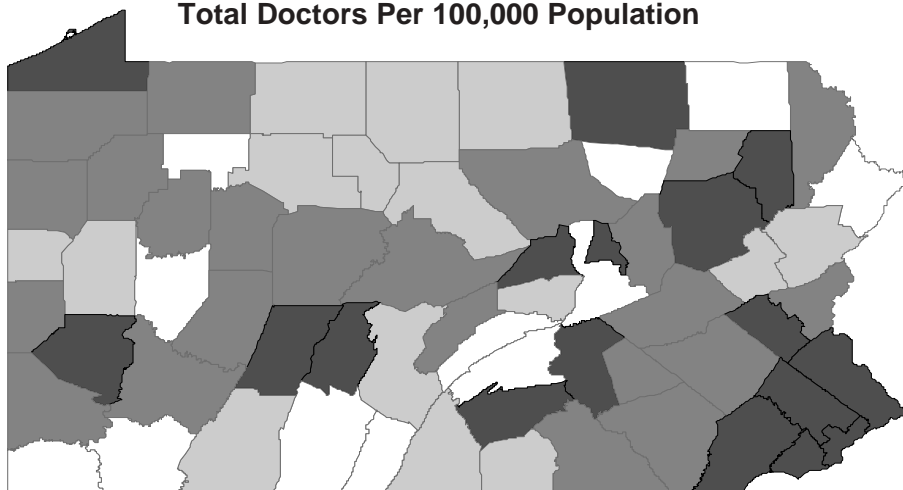
Total Doctors

- Of the commonwealth's 41,500 doctors, 10 percent practice in rural counties, serving 21 percent of the state's total population. The remaining 90 percent of physicians serve the 79 percent of the population living in urban counties.

- Per capita, there are 162 doctors for every 100,000 rural residents and 15 doctors for every 100 square miles in rural Pennsylvania. In urban areas, the per capita rate is more than double that in rural areas at 385 doctors for every 100,000 residents and 226 doctors for every 100 square miles.

- The 42 counties of rural Pennsylvania share 4,194 doctors for an average of about 100 per county. Four counties have fewer than 10 doctors and 10 other counties have fewer than 50. Meanwhile, only one urban county, Carbon, has fewer than 100 doctors. The number of rural doctors increased by 18 percent in the five years between 1994 and 1999 and 31 percent in the 10 years between 1989 and 1999.

Total Doctors Per 100,000 Population



Fewer than 100 100 to 150 151 to 250 More than 250

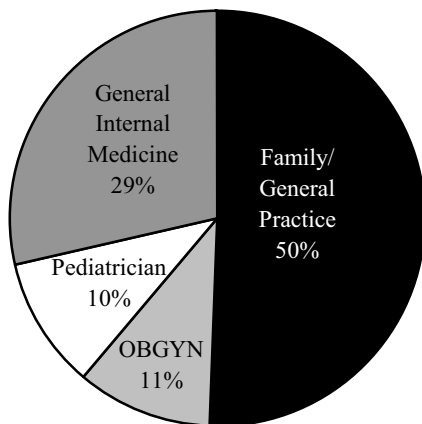
- Per capita numbers show a clearer rural/urban distinction. In 1999, there were 162 rural doctors for every 100,000 residents while the urban rate was 385. The rural figure ranged from 20 doctors per 100,000 in Forest County to 2,320 in Montour County, home of Geisinger Medical Center. The second highest rural rate was in Bradford County with 411 doctors per 100,000. Of the 30 counties with the lowest per capita rates, all but one (Carbon) are rural. The change in rural physicians per capita was significant, an increase of 15 percent from 1994 to 1999 and 24 percent from 1989 to 1999.

- Another significant factor is the distance one must travel to visit a doctor. Rural Pennsylvania accounts for 10 percent of the doctors but 63 percent of the land area in the state. That means there are 148 rural doctors for every 1,000 square miles, which represents a range from two in Forest County to 774 in Lebanon County (excluding Montour County, which is again an extreme outlier). All of the 25 counties with the fewest doctors per square mile are rural.

- In the United States as a whole, there were 227 physicians for every 100,000 residents in 1998.

- Also nationally, non-metro counties, which are similar though not the same as primarily rural counties, had 110 doctors for every 100,000 residents. Pennsylvania is faring better than the nation.

Rural Primary Care Physicians by Type



Primary Care Physicians

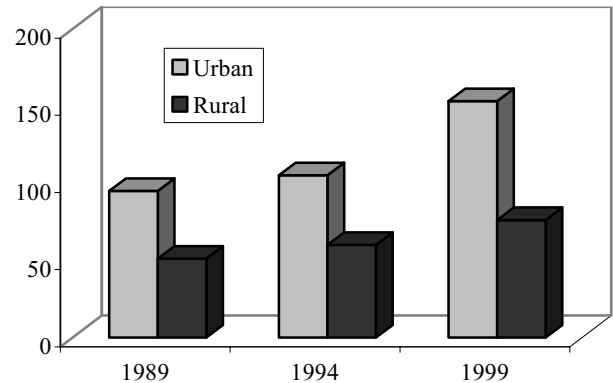
- Nearly half of all rural doctors are primary care physicians, numbering 1,974. Primary care physicians include family and general practice physicians, obstetricians/gynecologists (OB/GYNs), pediatricians and general internal medicine physicians. About half of all primary care physicians, 996, are family and general practice physicians. The 213 OB/GYNs and 198 pediatricians each make up about 10 percent of rural primary care doctors. There are an average of just five of each of these last two types of doctors per rural county compared to the 80 per urban county.

- The number of rural primary care physicians increased 30 percent from 1994 to 1999. The increase was not quite as large as the growth in population but still represents a 26 percent per capita gain. Since 1989, there was a very notable 58 percent growth in the number of primary care physicians or 49 percent per capita. While there were only 51 primary care physicians for every 100,000 rural residents in 1989, there were 60 in 1994 and 76 in 1999. But this new higher rate remains much lower than the urban rate of 153 primary care physicians for every 100,000 residents.

- Only 12 percent of the state's primary care physicians practice in rural counties, just slightly better than the 10 percent of total doctors. Although in 1999, 47 percent of all rural doctors were primary care physicians, only 43 percent were in 1994 and 39 percent were in 1989.

- The 996 family and general practice physicians in rural counties translates to 38 for every 100,000 residents. In urban areas, there were 56 for every 100,000 residents. Sixteen percent of the state's total have offices in rural areas. Rural Pennsylvania is better off than

Primary Care Physicians per 100,000 Population 1989 to 1999



the nation as a whole, which has just 29 family and general practitioners for every 100,000 residents.

- OB/GYNs are a second type of primary care physician. Ten percent of the commonwealth's OB/GYNs practice in rural counties, which have 21 OB/GYNs per 100,000 adult females compared to the 47 in urban counties. Seven rural counties have no OB/GYNs and seven other counties have 10 or fewer per 100,000 women. On average, there are eight OB/GYNs in rural Pennsylvania per 1,000 square miles, compared to 110 in urban areas.

- Rural pediatricians are almost as scarce as OB/GYNs at 32 per 100,000 children. In urban counties, there are 94 pediatricians for every 100,000 children. Yet again, seven rural counties have no pediatricians and 22 others have five or fewer. There are seven rural and 132 urban pediatricians per 1,000 square miles. A mere 8 percent of the state's total operate in rural Pennsylvania, the lowest percentage of any medical professional in this analysis.

Other Medical Professionals

- Nurse practitioners and physician assistants are a critical part of the health care picture. There are 510 nurse practitioners and 488 physician assistants in rural areas for an average of about 12 of each per county. Ten rural counties, however, have fewer than five nurse practitioners, and three counties have none. Eleven counties

Health Care Provider Indicators by County

	Total Doctors 1999	Doctors/ 100,000 pop	Hospitals 2000	Hospitals/ 100,000 pop	Nursing Homes 1999	Nursing Homes/ 100,000 pop
Pennsylvania	41,447	337	196	1.6	793	6.5
Rural	4,194	162	56	2.2	204	7.9
Urban	37,253	385	140	1.4	589	6.1
Adams	110	120	1	1.1	7	7.7
Allegheny	6,923	540	22	1.7	76	5.9
Armstrong	63	87	1	1.4	4	5.5
Beaver	298	164	2	1.1	9	5.0
Bedford	42	84	1	2.0	2	4.0
Berks	760	203	2	0.5	17	4.5
Blair	337	261	4	3.1	12	9.3
Bradford	258	411	3	4.8	5	8.0
Bucks	1,627	272	6	1.0	36	6.0
Butler	231	133	2	1.1	13	7.5
Cambria	444	291	4	2.6	9	5.9
Cameron	6	100	0	0.0	1	16.7
Carbon	60	102	2	3.4	3	5.1
Centre	262	193	2	1.5	6	4.4
Chester	1,151	266	5	1.2	22	5.1
Clarion	69	165	1	2.4	4	9.6
Clearfield	143	171	2	2.4	5	6.0
Clinton	45	119	2	5.3	3	7.9
Columbia	118	184	2	3.1	5	7.8
Crawford	145	160	2	2.2	7	7.7
Cumberland	554	259	2	0.9	17	8.0
Dauphin	1,394	554	3	1.2	13	5.2
Delaware	2,295	417	6	1.1	35	6.4
Elk	47	134	1	2.8	2	5.7
Erie	760	271	6	2.1	21	7.5
Fayette	147	99	3	2.0	9	6.1
Forest	1	20	0	0.0	1	20.2
Franklin	192	148	2	1.5	9	7.0
Fulton	8	56	1	7.0	1	7.0
Greene	39	96	1	2.5	3	7.4
Huntingdon	55	121	1	2.2	3	6.6

	Total Doctors 1999	Doctors/ 100,000 pop	Hospitals 2000	Hospitals/ 100,000 pop	Nursing Homes 1999	Nursing Homes/ 100,000 pop
Indiana	137	153	1	1.1	6	6.7
Jefferson	73	159	2	4.4	4	8.7
Juniata	11	48	0	0.0	4	17.5
Lackawanna	599	281	5	2.3	20	9.4
Lancaster	938	199	5	1.1	36	7.6
Lawrence	136	144	3	3.2	12	12.7
Lebanon	280	233	1	0.8	12	10.0
Lehigh	1,239	397	5	1.6	16	5.1
Luzerne	844	264	6	1.9	28	8.8
Lycoming	279	232	4	3.3	8	6.7
McKean	67	146	2	4.4	6	13.1
Mercer	295	245	3	2.5	15	12.5
Mifflin	87	187	1	2.2	4	8.6
Monroe	205	148	1	0.7	4	2.9
Montgomery	4,356	581	9	1.2	62	8.3
Montour	423	2,320	1	5.5	3	16.5
Northampton	580	217	2	0.7	12	4.5
Northumberland	87	92	2	2.1	9	9.5
Perry	32	73	0	0.0	4	9.2
Philadelphia	9,434	622	23	1.5	63	4.2
Pike	27	58	0	0.0	1	2.2
Potter	25	138	1	5.5	2	11.1
Schuylkill	234	156	4	2.7	14	9.3
Snyder	42	112	0	0.0	2	5.3
Somerset	98	122	3	3.7	7	8.7
Sullivan	3	46	0	0.0	2	30.5
Susquehanna	40	95	2	4.7	3	7.1
Tioga	56	135	1	2.4	3	7.3
Union	108	259	1	2.4	4	9.6
Venango	111	193	1	1.7	5	8.7
Warren	70	160	1	2.3	5	11.4
Washington	339	167	3	1.5	13	6.4
Wayne	73	153	1	2.1	3	6.3
Westmoreland	674	182	6	1.6	24	6.5
Wyoming	50	178	1	3.6	1	3.6
York	811	212	3	0.8	16	4.2

have fewer than five physicians assistants and three counties have none.

- Less traditional medical practitioners are especially hard to find in rural counties. Rural nurse midwives number 53 and chiropractors number 603. Half of the state's rural counties (21 counties of 42) have no nurse midwives compared to just two of the urban counties. Four counties, all of which

are rural, have no chiropractors.

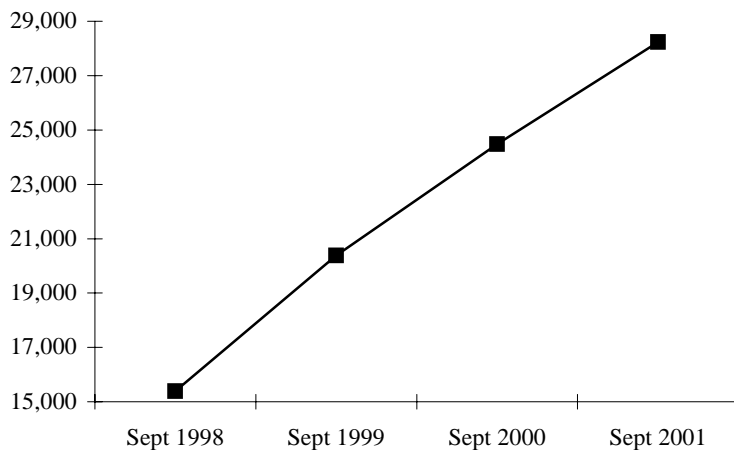
- Dentists are also concentrated in urban areas. Rural Pennsylvania has 1,154 dentists or 14 percent of the state's total number of dentists to serve more than 20 percent of the state's population.

Health Care Infrastructure

- The Census Bureau's 1999 County Business Patterns shows that employ-

ment in the Health Care and Social Services sector was at 110,541 in rural Pennsylvania. Nearly 15 percent of rural employment was in this sector, which includes ambulatory health care services, hospitals, nursing and residential care facilities, and social assistance. In 1998, the number of employees was 114,908, which means that employment fell 4 percent from 1998 to 1999.

Participation in CHIP by Eligible Children in Rural Counties



- Rural health care and social service employees earned an average annual salary of just over \$25,000 in 1999.
- Most of the health care and social services establishments were very small. Nearly three-quarters of the 5,677 establishments employed fewer than 10 people. Only 6 percent employed 50 or more.
- The numbers of hospitals and nursing homes as well as the number of beds in them are important indicators of access to health care. Rural Pennsylvania had just two fewer hospitals from 1990 to 2000, a very small drop from 58 to 56. The number of beds, however, fell by more than 30 percent from 8,776 to just 6,038. Over the same period, hospital admissions also fell by 8 percent to 247,336.
- The number of rural county nursing homes has increased slightly between 1996 and 1999 from 199 to 204. The number of nursing home beds decreased but by less than 1 percent to 22,087.
- On a per capita basis, rural counties fared better than their urban counterparts in terms of hospitals, nursing homes, and nursing home beds but not hospital beds.

Health Insurance

- According to Census Bureau figures, about 10 percent of Pennsylvanians had no health insurance coverage in recent years. This statistic fluctuated between 10.6 and 9.4 percent from 1994 to 1999. Then for 2000, the rate fell to 7.6 percent. Meanwhile, the national rate has consistently been about 6 percentage points higher than Pennsylvania's or 14 percent in 2000.
- In 2000, about 72 percent of Pennsylvanians had employment-based health coverage, 14 percent had Medicare coverage, and 9 percent had Medicaid (this adds to more than the percent covered because some people have more than one health insurance type) compared to 64, 13, and 10 percent, respectively, for the nation.
- HMOs (Health Maintenance Organizations) are becoming

an increasingly large percentage of insurance types used in the commonwealth. The 865,446 rural enrollments in HMOs in 2000 are up more than 300 percent from the 212,419 six years earlier.

- Efforts have been underway to insure the commonwealth's children, especially those whose families may have difficulty obtaining health insurance on their own. According to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (1999 to 2001, based on a three-year annual average), about 33 percent of Pennsylvania's children live at or below 200 percent of poverty and of those, 4.3 percent have no health insurance. This number has been steadily improving since 1993. The percent of children in that income range fell slightly from 38 percent of all children while those with no insurance fell significantly from 6.3 percent. This progress may be attributed, in part, to CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program) which increased enrollment of eligible children by nearly 75 percent in the three

years between September 1998 and 2001 from 65,500 to nearly 114,000. In rural counties, the increase was even greater at almost 85 percent.

Summary

Although access to health care services in Pennsylvania's rural counties continues to lag behind urban areas, there has been a slight improvement in the number of health care professionals serving the rural population. Rural health care is also receiving more attention from both the state and federal governments.

However, health care access and affordability remain priority issues, especially for rural Pennsylvania's increasingly aged population.

Rural definition and sources of information

Rural counties are defined as those whose population is more than 50 percent rural according to the 1990 Census, the most recent rural designation being used by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

The 1999 physician data is from the Pennsylvania State-Wide AHEC Provider Atlas, 2000, a product of the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health, which includes a compilation of files of the American Medical and American Osteopathic Associations and the Pennsylvania Department of State's Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. Counts include only active physicians and those engaged in non-clinical activities.

National data comes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for 1998. Both the Pennsylvania and United States data include Federal and non-Federal physicians.