

AUDIENCE PROFILE: PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS

64.4%

64.4% of the total rural population lives east of the Mississippi River.

10%

Only 10% of the total population in the Western United States live in rural areas.

28 M

Nearly half of all people living in rural areas are in the South region, which is about 28 million people.



As of the 2010 Census,
As of the 2010 Census,

- 704 counties had 100% of their population living in rural areas.
- 29 counties had 0% of their populations living in rural areas.



working with this group. This document is not an in-depth research report or analysis, as it is meant to help you have a general understanding of different factors that may affect your audience's availability, interest and/or commitment to your program. Use the questions listed at the end of this profile to validate and expand on the information provided for your local program's market.

In order to successfully engage your target audience, you must have a clear understanding of their culture, beliefs and barriers to health. This audience profile includes information about the nuances that need to be considered when reaching people in rural areas, based on the review of various research studies and also taking into consideration lessons learned through past experiences

Understanding Rural Populations

Rural and small town America is not just one kind of place. It includes the prairies of the Midwest, the wooded mountains of Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta and the "Black Belt" of fertile land in the South, unincorporated *colonias* and many places along the U.S.-Mexico border, remote and geographically isolated "frontier" areas across the West, and Native lands across the country.

According to the American Community Survey rural areas cover 97 percent of the land area of the United States but contain only 19.3 percent of the population. Of the 60 million rural people, 47 million are adults over the age of 18. (1)

Adults in rural areas tend to be older with a median age of 51 compared with adults in urban areas with a median age of 45. They have lower rates of poverty (11.7 percent compared with 14.0 percent urban areas) but are less likely to have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher (19.5 percent in rural areas compared with 29.0 percent in urban areas). Rural communities have fewer adults born in other countries compared with those in urban areas (4.0 percent in rural areas compared with 19.0 percent in urban areas) (2).

What is rural?

Multiple definitions of "rural" exist across federal agencies due to the multidimensional concepts of rural and urban. Sometimes population density is the defining concern, in some cases it is labor market issues and in other cases it is geographic isolation. Small population size typically characterizes a rural place, but how small is rural?

The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as what is not urban—that is, after defining individual urban areas, rural is what is left. Today, the Census bureau defines “urban areas” in one of two types of geographies:

- Urbanized Areas have a population of 50,000 or more
- Urban Clusters have a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000

Other federal agencies and researchers may use a different definition of rural. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service illustrates that there are several different ways to measure rural communities. (3)

The Economic Research Service and others who analyze conditions in “rural” America most often use data on nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas, defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on the basis of counties or county-equivalent units (e.g., parishes, boroughs). Counties are the standard building block for publishing economic data and for conducting research to track and explain regional population and economic trends.

In 2013, OMB defined metropolitan (metro) areas as broad labor-market areas that include:

- Central counties with one or more urbanized areas; urbanized areas are densely-settled urban areas with 50,000 or more people.
- Outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties based on labor force commuting. An outlying county is included if 25 percent of workers living in the county commute to the central urbanized area and the reverse – 25 percent of the workers in the central urbanized county travel to the outlying county to work.

Nonmetro counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and are further subdivided into two types:

- Micropolitan (micro) areas, which are nonmetro labor-market areas centered on urban clusters of 10,000-49,999 persons and defined with the same criteria used to define metro areas.
- All remaining counties, often labeled “noncore” counties because they are not part of “core-based” metro or micro areas. (4)

Differences in the Rural Population Based on Population Density and Isolation

Counties can be categorized into levels of rurality based on the percentage of the decennial census population

living in the rural areas. Using 2010 Census data, counties were classified as “mostly urban” (less than 50 percent of the population lived in rural areas), “mostly rural” (50 to 99.9 percent of the population lived in rural areas), and “completely rural” (100 percent of the population lived in rural areas). (5)

Between 2011 and 2015, about 9.0 percent of the rural population in the United States (5.3 million) lived in these completely rural counties, compared with about 41.0 percent (24.6 million) in the 1,185 mostly rural counties and about 50.0 percent (30.1 million) in the 1,253 mostly urban counties.

Characteristics and Cultural Understanding

The isolation and low population density of rural American has led to a unique culture among people in rural America. This culture varies widely based on geography, local industry, immigration patterns, race and ethnicity. There is not one “rural America” just as there is not one definition of rural in America. Despite its diversity rural Americans often share the following characteristics:

- Independent
- Self-sufficient
- Resilient
- Suspicious of “outsiders” and those from urban areas
- Loyalty to their community as they understand that community
- Pride of place and heritage
- Feeling of alienation from, and being short changed by the federal government
- Lower education levels
- Interconnectedness shown in a willingness to help their neighbors (6)

Most Americans, from both urban and rural areas, hold strongly positive views about rural life in America, perceiving rural America as the last stronghold of traditional values, close-knit families and communities and a strong work ethic. There are many dichotomies expressed about rural Americans however - rural life represents traditional American values, but is behind the times; rural life is more relaxed and slower than city life, but harder and more grueling; rural life is friendly, but intolerant of outsiders and difference; and rural life is richer in community life, but epitomized by individuals struggling independently to make ends meet. Rural America offers a particular quality of life

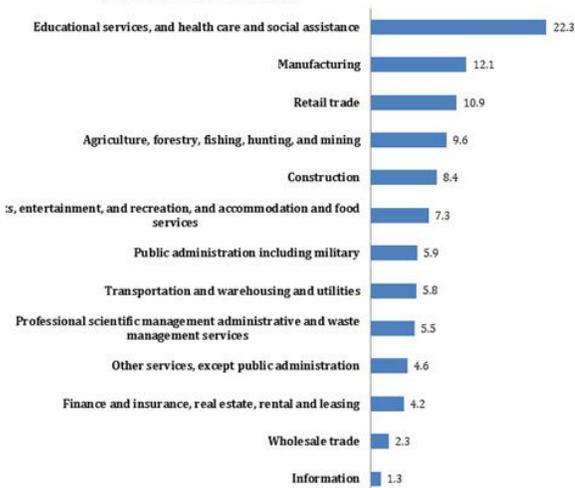
including serenity and aesthetic surroundings, and yet it is plagued by lack of opportunities, including access to health care. (7)

Ethnic and Racial Diversity in Rural America

Rural minorities are geographically concentrated in areas reflecting historic settlement patterns: African Americans in the South, Hispanics in the Southwest, and Native Americans in the West. Nonmetro Asian / Pacific Islanders are an exception. Only Hawaii has nonmetro counties with a predominantly Asian/ Pacific Islander population. This group is not geographically concentrated in the mainland with the exception of Pacific Islanders in Arkansas.

Rural America is characterized by distinct and separate communities based on race and ethnicity. Even when two races occupy the same county or town there will be a clear divide between the races and where they live. The impressions of rural life differ substantially based on race. Black rural Americans — most of whom live in the South — are far less likely than their white neighbors to feel positively about their communities. Sixty percent of blacks say their area is an excellent or good place to raise children, compared with 80 percent of whites. Rural blacks are 25 percentage points less likely than rural whites to give their community positive marks on safety and are 29 points less likely to say their area is a place where people look out for one another. Hispanics tend to fall in between whites and blacks in rating their communities. (8)

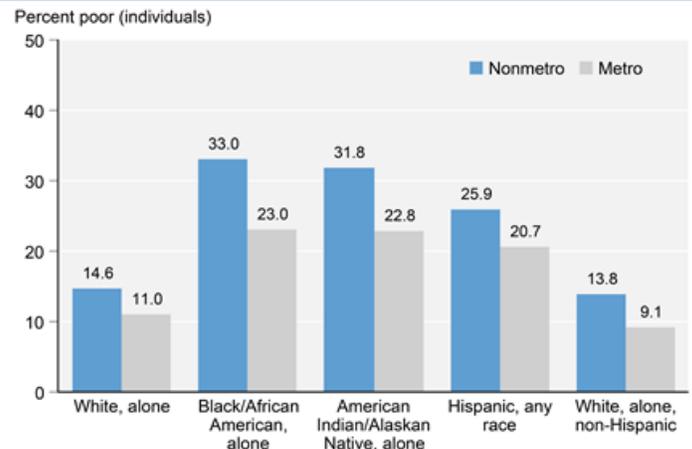
Figure 1. Percent Employed by Type of Industry: Completely Rural Counties
(Civilian labor force, 16 years and over)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year estimates. For information on the ACS, see www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/

Economic Implications

Poverty rates by race/ethnicity and metro/nonmetro residence, 2016



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016.

Both rural employment and median earnings are increasing since 2015. As employment and earnings have increased rural poverty has decreased. According to the U.S. Census Bureau rural Americans have lower median household incomes than urban households, but people living in rural areas have lower poverty rates than those living in urban areas. According to the 2015 American Community Survey, median household income for rural households was \$52,386, about 4.0 percent lower than the median for urban households, \$54,296. About 13.3 percent of people in rural areas lived in families with incomes below the official poverty thresholds. The poverty rate for people in urban areas was 16.0 percent. Income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, was lower for rural households than urban households.

Median incomes for rural households in the Northeast (\$62,291) and Midwest (\$55,704) were higher than their urban counterparts, \$60,655 and \$51,266, respectively. On the other hand, median incomes for urban households in the South and West were higher. Rural households in the South had a median household income of \$46,891 compared to \$50,989 for those living in urban areas. For households in the West, rural median household income was \$56,061, lower than the \$58,545 median for urban households.

Areas with a high incidence of poverty often reflect the low income of their racial/ethnic minorities. Nonmetro blacks and African Americans had the highest incidence of poverty in 2016 (33.0 percent), while nonmetro American Indians and Alaskan natives had the second highest rate (31.8 percent). The poverty rate for

nonmetro whites in 2016 was less than half as much (14.6 percent) of both groups. Nonmetro Hispanics had the third highest poverty rate of any individual race or ethnicity, which was 25.9 percent. The high rate of poverty for Hispanics is noteworthy as their share of the nonmetro population increased faster than other racial/ethnic groups over the last several decades. (9)

Health Behavior and Information Seeking

The health care system in rural areas is often uncoordinated, consisting of small, independent primary care offices, county health departments, federally supported community clinics, and small hospitals. Additionally, specialty providers have relatively low presence in rural communities, limiting residents' access to specialized care and technology. Addressing the overall shortage of health services and clinicians in rural communities is a national priority. Similarly, resolving transportation, insurance, socioeconomic barriers and improving health care infrastructure in rural areas may increase rural residents' use of medical care. Additional barriers such as stigma, lack of privacy, lack of culturally appropriate interventions, and acceptance of poor health have been documented in rural communities.

Many rural communities are characterized by higher concentrations of ethnic minorities, persistent poverty, historical discrimination, poor health care infrastructure, and designation as health professional shortage areas by the federal government. Similarly, rural residents may have further distances to travel for care due to physical terrain compared to their urban counterparts. Regarding individual or compositional determinants such as demographics, rural residents tend to be older, of lower socioeconomic status, and reliant on governmental health insurance or uninsured compared to urban individuals. Personal health practices of rural residents (e.g., increased rates of smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet; decreased rates of health information-seeking) and their health beliefs (e.g., fatalistic attitudes, perceived negative health) may also influence health care avoidance. Additionally, rural residents may avoid care for health conditions that they perceive are more stigmatizing (e.g., mental health disorders, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections). Moreover, in some instances, rural residents have reported greater difficulties in navigating the health care system, poorer patient-provider relationships (primarily due to mistrust), and lack of culturally competent health care services, which in turn

influences their overall satisfaction with the health care system. (10)

While access to health care is an issue for all rural Americans three out of four non-white rural Americans live in federally defined health care professional shortage areas. In rural America 10 percent of the non-Hispanic White population live in a county without a hospital compared to 12 percent of African Americans. Rural counties that are predominantly Hispanic also have limited access to health care with only 5.3 physicians per 10,000 people vs an average of 8.7 per 10,000 in other rural counties.

Rural America's Opioid Crisis

According to numerous Federal Agencies including CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the effects of the opioid epidemic are more intense in rural communities where employment opportunities are often limited and isolation is pervasive. Between 1999 and 2015, opioid death rates in rural areas have quadrupled among those 18-to-25-year-olds and tripled for females. (11)

The opioid crisis may prevent a barrier to participation for both potential partners and participants in rural communities where limited resources are committed to addressing the opioid issue.

Media Habits

Consumers living in small towns/cities tend to rely on traditional media sources such as television and newspapers for local news and information. In fact, the Pew Research Center study found that when compared to consumers living in communities of different sizes, consumers living in small towns/cities are the most likely to worry about what would happen if their local newspaper no longer existed. It is also important to note that these consumers are less likely to use the Internet and/or email or have a cell phone than consumers in larger communities.

Rural consumers use the fewest sources of media to obtain local news and information (average 3.3 local news sources per week, tied with small town/city consumers.) They are also the most likely to only rely on traditional news sources. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are the least likely to obtain local

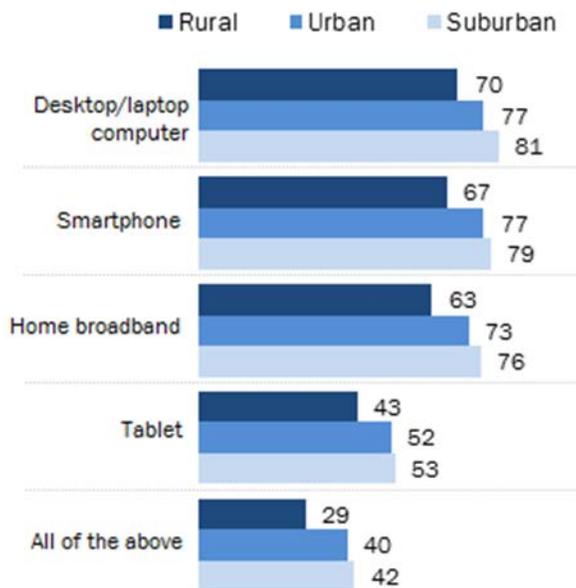
National Diabetes Prevention Program – People in Rural Areas Profile

news and information via a mobile device, when compared to consumers living in larger communities.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of rural Americans say they have a broadband internet connection at home, up from about a third (35 percent) in 2007, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in fall 2016. Rural Americans are now 10 percentage points less likely than Americans overall to have home broadband; in 2007, there was a 16-point gap between rural Americans (35 percent) and all U.S. adults (51 percent) on this question.

Majority of rural Americans have home broadband, but digital divide remains

% of U.S. adults who say they have ...



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 29–Nov. 6, 2016.

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Mobile technology use among rural adults has also risen rapidly, with the share of those owning smartphones and tablets increasing sharply. Ownership of desktop or laptop computers, by contrast, has only slightly risen since 2008.

Despite recent gains in digital technology adoption, rural adults remain less likely than urban and suburban adults to have and use these technologies. For example, rural Americans are 7 to 12 percentage points less likely than those in urban and suburban areas to say they have a smartphone, traditional computer or tablet computer.

Rural adults also are less likely to have *multiple* devices that enable them to go online: About three-in-ten adults who live in rural communities (29 percent) report that they own a desktop or laptop computer, a smartphone, a home broadband connection *and* a tablet computer; by contrast, 40 percent of urban adults and 42 percent of suburban adults own all four of these devices.

Rural residents also go online less frequently than their urban and suburban counterparts. Roughly six-in-ten adults (58 percent) who live in rural communities say they use the internet on at least a daily basis, compared with more than three-quarters of those in urban (80 percent) or suburban (76 percent) areas. Meanwhile, roughly one-in-five rural adults (19 percent) say they *never* go online, compared with 11 percent of those who live in urban communities and 10 percent of those who live in the suburbs.

Broadband gap seen among higher income Americans

% of U.S. adults with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more who say they have ...

	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Desktop/laptop computer	94	98	96
Smartphone	85	95	94
Home broadband	84	94	93
Tablet	68	71	68

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 29–Nov. 6, 2016.

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As is true of the population as a whole, financially well-off rural residents have high levels of technology adoption: 84 percent of rural residents living in households earning \$75,000 or more a year say they have broadband internet services at home, and 85 percent own a smartphone. However, smartphone and broadband penetration exceeds 90 percent among higher-income residents of urban and suburban areas.

These comparably low levels of adoption among even high-income rural residents may be due to a unique feature of rural life. Even though rural areas are more wired today than in the past, substantial segments of rural America *still lack the infrastructure needed* for high-speed internet, and what access these areas do have *tends to be slower* than that of nonrural areas. The Federal Communications Commission recently

announced the formation of a [Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force](#) to serve unconnected areas and expand mobile coverage to the rural communities in the U.S.

Considerations for Messaging

When developing messages for rural audiences consider the following:

- Most rural audiences have a high school education or less.
- Rural audiences are very homogenous – your message needs to speak to the specific group you are trying to reach.
- Rural audiences are very patriotic and have tremendous pride of place and culture.
- Local spokespeople are critical for acceptance.
- Rural people are independent and self-reliant while at the same time interdependent and possessing a strong desire to help one another.
- Internet access is often unreliable.
- Tie messages to economic benefit.

Proven Promotion Strategies

While there is little data to support proven strategies for promoting type 2 diabetes prevention lifestyle change programs in rural communities, other chronic disease initiatives have found the following strategies to be successful. (12)

- **Community Councils:** Create and execute your promotion activities with and through a council of trusted local leaders.
- **Faith Communities:** Faith communities are often the place most people in rural communities gather. Work with the pastor and congregational leaders to offer your program, promote your program, and provide supporting activities like healthier meal functions and exercise classes.
- **Schools:** Schools are often major employers and gathering places in rural communities. Use school communication systems to reach adults in the community and school facilities for activities.
- **Employers:** rural employers are more likely to know and even be related to their employees. Use the inherent sense of community common in rural areas to promote your program.

Questions for Consideration

Understanding Your Rural Population

- What are the demographics of your rural population?

Demographics	Statistic/Data
Population Percentage	
Median Age	
Gender	
Country of Origin	
Language (spoken)	
Population with Prediabetes	
Economic Status	

- What are the cultural and language nuances for the rural community?
- Within your community, are there particularly active or large groups that represent people in rural areas?

Health Care and Health Information Seeking Behaviors

- Where does your local rural population go for health care? Be specific.
- How accessible is health care within the community, especially for people in rural areas?
- Who are the trusted sources for health information for the rural population? Are they different or the same as other trusted sources?

Trusted Sources

- Who are the trusted thought leaders in your local community?
 - Community Based Organizations?
 - Faith Communities?
 - Health Care Providers?
 - Vocal advocates?
- Who has access to these groups? With whom do you need to collaborate?
- How can you utilize these trusted sources to help you with marketing and promoting your lifestyle change program?

Media Habits

- Which media channels, including social and digital media, are most popular and/or preferred among people in your community?
- What relationships do you have with these media outlets? Who do you need to reach out to?
- What infrastructure does your organization have to utilize popular social and digital channels? What do you need to strengthen?

Messages

- Are your messages culturally sensitive?
- Do you have images that will resonate with your rural population?
- Are you working with community organizations or groups that will be able to assist with message development for your marketing materials?

Barriers and Benefits to National DPP

- What are the specific barriers in your community?
- How will you work to mitigate these?
- What benefits are meaningful to your community? How can you work these benefits into your marketing materials?
- What does your lifestyle change program offer the community that other prevention programs or events don't or can't?

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