



ACC HEALTH EQUITY WEBINAR COMPANION GUIDE

Enhancing Cardiovascular Health in Rural Communities: Identifying Challenges and Opportunities

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The ACC Health Equity Webinar Companion Guides are a complementary resource for the ACC Health Equity Webinar series. The webinar series, produced by the ACC Diversity and Inclusion Committee, offers clinically relevant, evidence-based findings focused on health care disparities as they pertain to minority racial and ethnic groups and underrepresented populations in cardiovascular care. This guide provides the background, highlights and clinical pearls from the “Enhancing Cardiovascular Health in Rural Communities: Identifying Challenges and Opportunities” webinar. Learn more at [ACC.org/Diversity](https://www.acc.org/Diversity).

BACKGROUND

60 million people, around 20% of the population, live in rural areas of the U.S. The rural population, when compared with the urban population is older (19% vs. 15% >65 years), less racially and ethnically diverse (White adults 78% vs. 57%) and experiences higher levels of poverty (15% vs 12%).

Cardiovascular death rates are higher in rural areas of the U.S., compared to urban areas. Over the past two decades, rural-urban disparities in cardiovascular mortality have widened, driven largely by a concerning rise among adults less than 65 years old in rural areas.

Adults in rural communities have a 40% higher prevalence of heart disease when compared with their urban counterparts. Several underlying and connected factors contribute to rural-urban disparities in cardiovascular mortality. Rural areas have significant health systems, economic and social challenges that collectively contribute to worse cardiovascular health, including:

Income, educational attainment and employment levels are all, on average, lower in rural areas compared with urban areas



Lack of housing,
food security and
transportation



Significant barriers
when trying to
access outpatient
and post-acute care



Hospital closures that
reduce timely access
to care for urgent and
emergent conditions



Adverse mental
health and behavioral
risk factors



Tobacco use remains
more than two times
higher

Partly due to the challenges mentioned above, people living in rural areas also have a burden of cardiometabolic risk factors, including hypertension, diabetes mellitus and obesity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Disparities in cardiovascular health have widened between rural and urban communities in the U.S.
- Several key factors have driven these epidemiological changes, including:
 - A higher burden of cardiometabolic risk factors
 - Social determinants of health
 - Health insurance and access to medical care
 - Health care system quality and capacity

CLINICAL PEARLS



Rural-urban differences in cardiovascular mortality have widened over the past two decades.



The disparities have been driven by multiple factors, including the changing epidemiology of cardiometabolic and behavioral risk factors, social and economic challenges and access to care and health systems.



Multi-faceted strategies at the individual, health system, environmental and policy levels are needed to improve cardiovascular health in rural communities.

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