



Rural Health in California: A Summary of Recent Findings

Background

Through a detailed analysis of rural and urban health statistics spanning the past seven years, a recent Department of Health Services (DHS) reports illustrates the current state of affairs in rural California. Approximately 80 percent of the total land mass of California is rural, and the importance of understanding the dynamics of the rural health care safety net cannot be understated.

A significant trend in the DHS report is the continuing rise in population. Even in the past three years, the net number of rural patients has increased 20 percent, but the number of rural clinics increased only by 15 percent. By comparing such statistics, the report found that between 2003 and 2006 the number of rural and urban clinics increased at a similar rate, but, the number of patients increased more in rural counties. This resulted in a decrease in the number of overall encounters per patient in rural counties. This example shows a downward trend in patient care that is magnified by the unique challenges posed to the residents of rural areas, such as workforce shortages and geographic barriers. Expanding the rural health care system at a sustainable rate to match increasing population is a major issue facing California as we move into 2008.

Highlights

- Rural residents without health insurance rose 3% in the past 3 years.²
- Rural patient numbers increased 20.28% between 2003-2006 but the number of clinics increased only 15.32%.¹
- Medicare is used by 8% more respondents in rural California than in urban areas.³
- 13.2% of California's rural children are reported to be overweight.⁴
- 8 California counties have only 1 rural health clinic.⁵
- Only 1 Veteran Affairs Medical Center (hospital) is located in a rural county.⁶
- 6% fewer individuals in rural areas reported having had HIV Testing in 2006.⁷
- Actual birth rates were the same for rural and urban centers were the same between 2000 and 2002: about 15.0 per thousand.⁸
- 6% of rural hospitals have closed since 2006.⁹
- The number of rural Medi-cal traditional payers has increase by approximately 80,000 since 2003.¹

¹Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development Primary Care Clinic Utilization Report

²2002 to 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

³2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

⁴The Health and Well-Being of Children in Rural Areas: A Portrait of the Nation 2005

⁵Licensing and Certification's OSCAR program as of October 18, 2007

⁶US Depart of Veteran Affairs: <http://www1.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?dnum=1&STATE=CA>

⁷2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

⁸CA Vital-net, Expert Health Data Programming EHDP 2006

⁹Primary and Rural Health Division: California Office of Rural Health

¹⁰Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) 2006 Primary Care Clinic Annual Utilization Report

