

On the Farm and Everywhere Else: Rural Aging in the U.S.

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Agenda

- What does aging in rural areas of the U.S. look like?
- Key challenges and concerns
- Moving forward

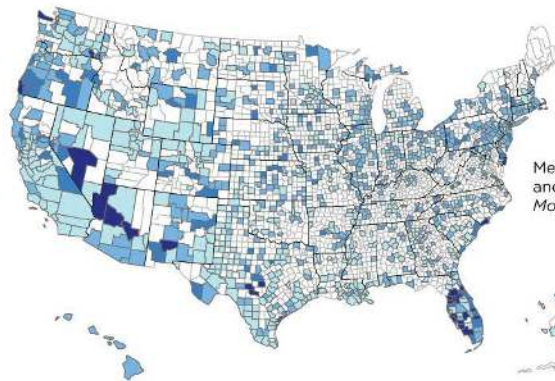
Rural aging in the U.S.: Basics (Symens Smith & Trevelyan, 2019)

- More than 1 in 5 older Americans live in rural areas
- 17.5% of the rural population was 65 years and older compared to 13.8% in urban areas from 2012-2016

Percent 65 Years and Over by Level of Rurality: 2012-2016



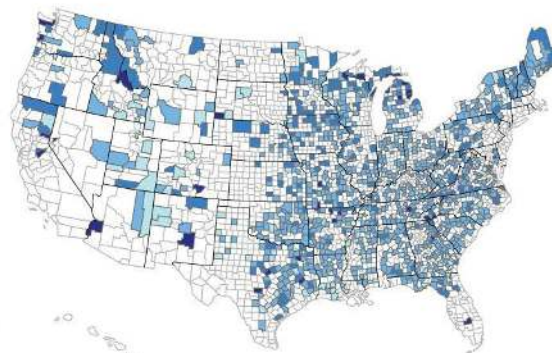
Mostly urban counties
(Population is less than 50.0 percent rural)



Median county percent 65 years
and older is 15.1 percent.
Mostly urban counties: 1,253



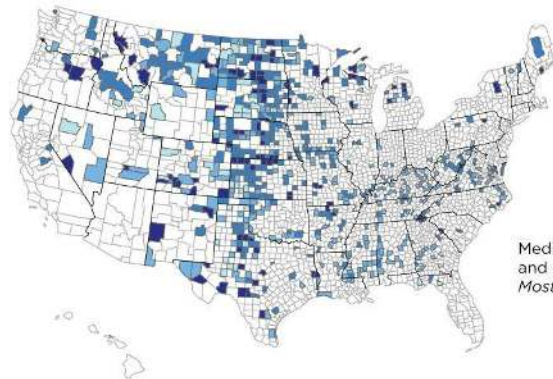
Mostly rural counties
(Population is 50.0 to 99.9 percent rural)



Median county percent 65 years
and older is 17.8 percent.
Mostly rural counties: 1,185



Completely rural counties
(Population is 100 percent rural)

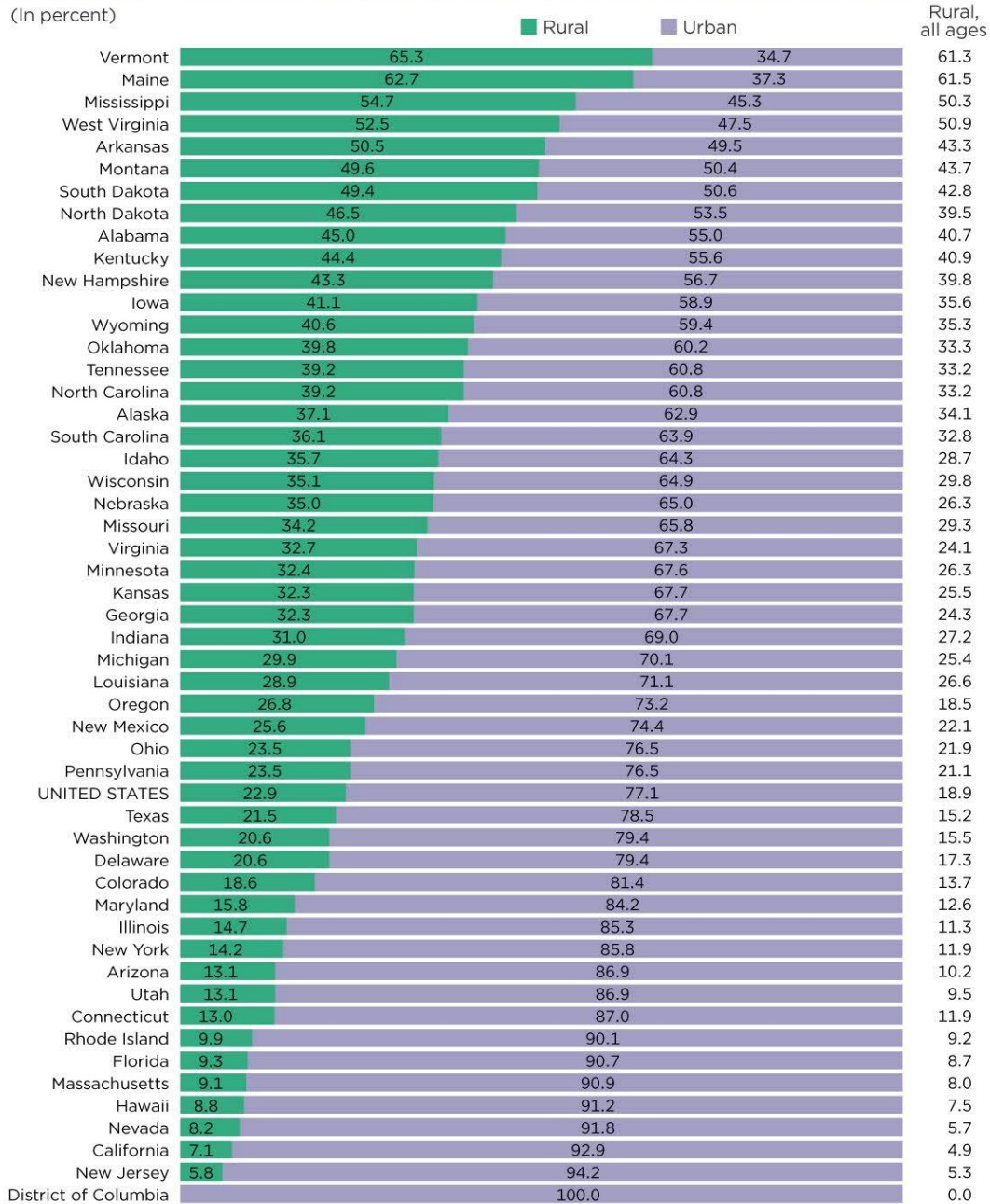


Median county percent 65 years
and older is 20.2 percent.
Completely rural counties: 704



Percentage of the Population 65 Years and Over in Rural and Urban Areas by State: 2012-2016

(In percent)



Note: Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <www.census.gov/acs>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates.

Other interesting statistics (Symens Smith & Trevelyan, 2019)

- There are more older men than older women in rural areas.
 - Likely due to aging in place via rural farming or mining occupations
 - Potential migration patterns as well
- 68.7% of older persons in rural areas live with others, compared to 75.9% in rural areas
 - 27.6% of older persons live alone in urban areas, vs. 27.6% in rural
- Fewer older persons live in nursing homes in rural areas (1.4%) vs. urban (3.1%)
 - What does this mean?

Reasons for Rural Aging Challenges (from Skoufalos et al., 2017, p. S-3)

- “Cash-strapped local governments.”
- “Difficulty forming community partnerships because of proximity challenges.”
- “Migration of younger individuals to cities for career and social opportunities, resulting in a smaller pool of potential caregivers.”
- “Struggling small businesses and dwindling economic opportunities.”
- “An aging housing stock that also may be unsafe.”
- “A raging opioid crisis that has turned many grandparents into caregivers.”
- “Inadequate resources available to meet the broad range of needs among older adults.”

Persistent Provider Shortages (Jaffe, 2015)

- The number of physicians for every 10,000 people is approximately 30 percent lower in rural communities
 - This extends even more dramatically to specialists such as geriatricians, where the national mean per 10,000 people 75+ is 3.8
- An opportunity for nurses/nurse care coordinators to fill this gap
 - DNPs

Geographic distance (Skoufalos et al., 2017)

- A key concern often raised is the need for transportation
 - This is compounded by the need to travel even greater distances for care with the closing of rural hospitals
 - Transportation is often key to social engagement
- Possible solutions proposed:
 - Volunteer organizations
 - Ride sharing companies: working with VA, AARP pilot with Lyft
 - Optimizing underutilized resources that are otherwise idle

An aging workforce (Jaffe, 2015)

- Jaffe shares in her article that in some North Dakota nursing homes, majority of *staff* are in their 70s and 80s themselves
- Is aging in place going to be truly possible for older persons who can no longer live in their household?
 - Consideration of alternative community-based/residential strategies

Investing in Rural Infrastructure (Henning-Smith & Lahr, in press)

- Solutions in rural communities cannot be simply age-specific, but rather require more general focus on building infrastructure
 - e.g., broadband

Interesting Resources

- Rural Health Information Hub
 - <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/aging/1/introduction>
- Rural Caregivers Website
 - <https://engineering.purdue.edu/~bng/Caregiving/index.html>

References

- Jaffe, S. (2015). Aging in rural America. *Health Affairs*, 34 (1), 7-10.
- Skoufalos, A., Clarke, J. L., Rose Ellis, D., Shepard, V. L., & Rula, E. Y. (2017). Rural aging in America: Proceedings of the 2017 Connectivity Summit. *Population Health Management*, 20 (Supp. 2), S1-S10.
- Symens Smith, A., & Trevelyan, E. (2019). In some states, more than half of residents live in rural areas. U.S. Census Bureau, available at: <https://bit.ly/3cYdkys>

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