



RURAL HEALTH: AVAILABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

Access to high-quality health care, including both preventative and sick care, is a crucial component of living a healthy life—and every North Carolinian deserves access to quality health care, regardless of socioeconomic status, zip code, ability, or any other factor.

This access is especially critical in unserved and underserved areas of our state, where the populations tend to be older and/or have underlying health conditions that necessitate a greater offering of care. Additionally, the recruitment and retention of health care providers across the state is a necessary component to ensuring that rural North Carolinians are able to access care when they need it.

With rural hospitals closures steadily rising (11 have closed since 2005), when rural residents are in need of emergency care, they are most likely to seek that care from their local hospital—and not having that critical health care infrastructure creates an economic burden an entire community will grapple with.

Though our state has done an increasingly good job of expanding telehealth, without comprehensive access to broadband, many rural residents are unable to take advantage of these resources. Furthermore, virtual access to health providers does not and should not supersede the clear gap in access to a variety of healthcare providers within our rural communities. While there are clear challenges here, our state has made steady strides in the right direction.

North Carolina has a robust network of nonprofit, private, philanthropic, corporate, community, and government entities that have ramped up their services, innovated new approaches, and advocated diligently for their various constituencies. Together, we are doing our part to support our communities.

AS OF DECEMBER 2019,¹
NORTH CAROLINA
1 OF 14
STATES 
THAT HAVE NOT
EXPANDED MEDICAID

APPROXIMATELY²
500,000
NORTH CAROLINIANS
FALL WITHIN THE
HEALTHCARE COVERAGE GAP

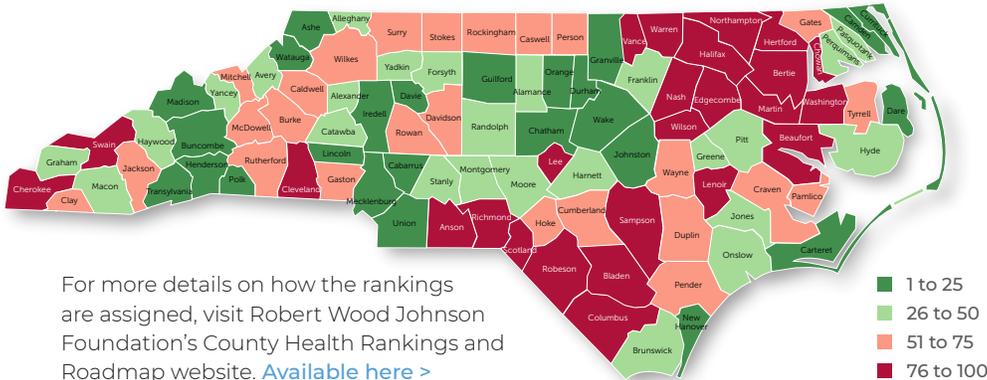
 **11** **RURAL**
HOSPITAL
CLOSURES
IN NORTH CAROLINA
SINCE 2005³

⁴ **8** **RURAL**
HOSPITALS
IN FINANCIAL DISTRESS
AS OF 2017

63 OF 80⁵
RURAL COUNTIES IN
NORTH CAROLINA
ARE DESIGNATED AS
HEALTH PROFESSIONAL
SHORTAGE AREAS

2019 COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS

Counties are ranked from highest to lowest with 1 being highest and 100 being lowest.



6

AFRICAN AMERICAN INFANTS WERE 2.44x

MORE LIKELY TO DIE IN 2018 IN NORTH CAROLINA THAN WHITE INFANTS

7

26 OF 100 COUNTIES IN NORTH CAROLINA DO NOT HAVE AN OB-GYN

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Close the health insurance coverage gap in North Carolina.
- Expand efforts to recruit and retain rural health providers, including specialists in underserved areas of the state.
- Implement recommendations for a statewide telemedicine policy made by DHHS in 2017.
- Investigate opportunities to attract mid-level health care providers to rural areas by allowing full practice authority and increasing scope of practice.
- Explore broad-based solutions for the substance abuse crisis that address both prevention and treatment.
- Support the Healthy North Carolina 2030 attainment goals that seek to holistically address and improve the health, safety, and well-being of North Carolinians.

DATA SOURCES

1. Kaiser Family Foundation. Status of State Medicaid Expansion Decisions: Interactive Map. Published April 27, 2020. [Available here >](#)
2. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States that Do Not Expand Medicaid—An Update. (January 2016). [Available here >](#)
3. Sheps Center > Programs > NC Rural Health Research Program > 170 Rural Hospital Closures: January 2005 – Present (128 since 2010). [Available here >](#)
4. NC Rural Health Research Program Senate Finance Testimony on Rural Hospital Closures: May 24, 2018. NC Rural Health Research Program, Sheps Center for Health Services Research, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [Available here >](#)
5. NC DHHS. NC Office of Rural Health Counties Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas SFY 2020. [Available here >](#)
6. NC Department of Health & Human Services State Center for Health Statistics. [Available here >](#)
7. Knopf, T. (2018, January 22). N.C. rural health by the numbers. North Carolina Health News. [Available here >](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO GET INVOLVED:

Visit: www.ncruralcenter.org/research/advocacy

Follow @RuralCounts on Twitter

