



Physicians in the Rural South Lack HIV Expertise

Researchers analyzed the urban/rural divide in access to expert HIV-related health care.

April 15, 2020 By [Benjamin Ryan](#)

A considerable dearth of health care providers with substantial experience treating HIV prevails in rural communities in the South, Contagion Live reports.

Publishing their findings in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, April D. Kimmel, PhD, of Virginia Commonwealth University, and colleagues analyzed Medicaid claims data and clinician characteristics, National Center for Health data and AIDS-Vu data regarding 14 Southern states.

The investigators identified 5,012 health care providers who offered routine HIV care, only 13% of whom practiced in rural counties. More than 90% of the clinicians who practiced in rural counties were not considered experienced because they had not provided care for 10 or more HIV-positive Medicaid enrollees over a three-year period. Thirty percent of the overall group of health care providers were considered experienced in treating HIV.

Eighty-one percent of the counties had no providers experienced in treating HIV. Experienced clinicians were more likely to practice in urban counties versus rural ones.

Eighty-two percent of the health care providers treating HIV were physicians, while 12% were advanced practitioners, such as a nurse practitioner. Of these 4,094 physicians, just 18% were infectious disease specialists.

Of the 926 counties that the study authors analyzed, 373 had no clinicians who focused on HIV care. Nearly 60% of the counties with no HIV-focused clinicians were in rural areas. An estimated 12,000 people with diagnosed HIV lived in the counties that had no HIV-focused health care providers.

“Significant urban-rural disparities exist in HIV-experienced workforce capacity for Southern U.S. communities,” the study authors concluded. “Policies to improve equity in access to HIV-experienced clinical care for both urban and rural communities are urgently needed.”

To read the Contagion Live article, [click here](#).

To read the study abstract, [click here](#).

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