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Pandemic Rural Health Overview

Photo: Germany Valley, West Virginia

Rural Health Before the Pandemic

- Reduced Life Expectancy ([Am J Prev Med.](#) 2014 Feb;46(2):e19-29)
 - 79.1 years in large metropolitan areas
 - 76.9 years in small urban towns
 - 76.7 years in rural areas
- Drivers: the opioid crisis and other “diseases of despair” (Case and Deaton, 2015)
 - Epidemic of epidemics: overdose deaths, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, increasing HIV, abandoned children, neonatal abstinence syndrome, first responder burnout
 - Adverse childhood experiences impact mental and physical health into adulthood
 - Social Determinants of Health: housing, transportation, education, economics, access to nutritious food

Hospital Closures and Shrinking Public Health

- 161 rural hospitals closed nationwide since 2005
- 18 rural hospitals shutdown in 2019
- 2 rural hospitals closed in West Virginia since the pandemic started
- Prevention and Public Health Fund, from the CDC
 - roughly [\\$625 million a year](#) to state and local initiatives, such as immunizations for children, grants for local needs, and programs to respond to infectious diseases
 - [Trust for America's Health report](#): from 2013 to 2027 the fund will receive nearly \$12 billion less than the law had promised

Bright Spots

- FQHCs serve 1 in 12 Americans nationwide, 1 in 4 West Virginians, often underserved populations
- ACA Medicaid expansion: WV with 55% reduction in uninsured rate from 2013 to 2018
- West Virginia was the last state to report COVID-19 cases, more time to prepare
- So far, the least affected state with the most at risk population (age, comorbidities) according to KFF
- COVID-19: 929 cases, 26 deaths (4/21 at 2200)



Strategies

- Screening respiratory from non-respiratory patients
- Big shift to telemedicine
- Future: Testing (molecular and serology), Tracing, Isolation/Quarantining, and hopefully treatment
- Holy Grail: Vaccine