



Bridging the Gap: Rural-Urban Disparities in Healthcare Access

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ARTICLE INFO

©2025 RS Publication

Paper ID: IJRM-
6922009C0B976

Received: 2025-10-27

Published: 2025-11-26

DOI:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17723243>

Page No: 58-61



ABSTRACT

This study examines disparities in healthcare access and outcomes between rural and urban populations, with a focus on identifying strategies to reduce inequities in rural settings. Using a cross-sectional design, data were extracted from national health databases and peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2024. Multilevel regression models were employed to assess provider-to-population ratios, travel times, and hospitalisation outcomes, while Concentration Index analysis quantified socioeconomic inequities. The results revealed that rural regions had 42% fewer primary care providers per 10,000 residents compared to urban areas ($p < 0.01$), with average travel times to acute care facilities nearly tripled (28.7 km vs. 9.6 km). Preventable hospitalizations for chronic conditions were 31% higher in rural populations, and 30-day readmission rates exceeded urban benchmarks by 11%. Equity analysis confirmed a significant negative concentration index ($CI = -0.24$), indicating disproportionate disease burden among low-income rural households. Model validation yielded a root mean square error (RMSE) of 0.087, suggesting robust predictive accuracy. These findings highlight urgent systemic challenges while demonstrating that targeted interventions, such as telehealth and community health worker programs, hold promise for addressing rural-urban health gaps.

Keywords: Rural health disparities, Healthcare access, Preventable hospitalizations, Provider-to-population ratio, socioeconomic inequities, Telehealth interventions

Cite This Paper: Rukayat Abisola Olawale, Owoade O. Odesanya, Olatunji Bolanle Blessing Ijeoma Chioma Mordi, Ngozi Blessing Umoru, Sandra A Palmer, Olajide O, Olajojo and Kemi K.Oladapo8(2025). "Bridging the Gap: Rural-Urban Disparities in Healthcare Access". *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN MANAGEMENT (IJRM)*, vol. 15, no. 6, 2025, pp. 58-61. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17723243>

1. Introduction

Healthcare disparities between rural and urban populations remain a persistent and deeply entrenched public health issue. Despite decades of recognition and reform efforts, significant inequities continue to shape morbidity, mortality, and access to care across geographic divides [1]. Rural residents experience disproportionately higher rates of chronic diseases, delayed diagnoses, and preventable hospitalizations, while access to both primary and specialized care remains limited [2]. One of the most enduring challenges lies in the uneven distribution of healthcare providers. Rural areas consistently report lower per capita availability of physicians, specialists, and behavioural health practitioners, which contributes to poorer health outcomes and reduced continuity of care [3]. Beyond workforce shortages, geographic isolation exacerbates these disparities. Longer travel distances, limited public transportation, and inadequate emergency services make it difficult for rural residents to receive timely and coordinated care [4]. Consequently, rural populations remain structurally disadvantaged, particularly when acute or time-sensitive conditions arise [5].

In recent years, technological innovations such as telehealth have been heralded as equalizers in healthcare delivery. However, evidence suggests that these advancements have not achieved equitable reach. Studies reveal that telehealth utilization remains higher among urban and affluent populations, reflecting systemic inequities in digital access, infrastructure, and literacy [6]. For many rural communities, limited broadband connectivity and affordability issues have slowed adoption, thereby compounding existing healthcare gaps [7]. Even when services are available, factors such as cultural preferences, health beliefs, and socioeconomic constraints influence care-seeking behaviours and undermine equitable utilization [8]. These issues highlight that disparities in healthcare access are not solely geographical—they are embedded in a broader socioeconomic context that encompasses education, income, and insurance coverage [9].

Socioeconomic disadvantage plays a pivotal role in amplifying health inequities. Rural residents, on average, experience higher poverty rates, lower levels of education, and lower insurance coverage than their urban counterparts [10]. These conditions reinforce structural vulnerability, limiting individuals' ability to seek preventive care or adhere to treatment regimens [11]. Furthermore, the growing digital divide has intensified inequality, as limited technological literacy

and inadequate broadband infrastructure exclude rural communities from the benefits of electronic health records, digital coordination platforms, and teleconsultations [12]. Without addressing these foundational gaps, technological advancements such as artificial intelligence–driven diagnostics and predictive modeling may unintentionally widen the chasm between rural and urban populations [13], [14]. The persistence of “medical deserts,” particularly in remote or economically disadvantaged regions, underscores the need for sustained investment in both human and technological resources [15].

Professional organizations have repeatedly emphasized that rural health inequities are preventable rather than inevitable. The American Medical Association, for instance, advocates for collaborative interventions that combine workforce expansion with systemic policy reforms [16]. Similarly, the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association have issued comprehensive advisories calling for reforms that consider both clinical access and social determinants of health [17]. Empirical studies have supported these calls, demonstrating worsening health outcomes among rural populations in areas such as chronic disease management and hospital readmissions between 2015 and 2019 [18]. Historical reviews provide a sobering context: many of the disparities observed today, including those affecting maternal mortality and minority populations, echo the same challenges documented a century ago [19]. This continuity underscores how deeply structural and institutional these inequities are, demanding multidimensional solutions rather than isolated interventions.

Readmission rates further illustrate the disparities embedded within the healthcare system. Rural patients are significantly more likely to experience 30-day readmissions following discharge, reflecting systemic weaknesses in care coordination, follow-up, and community-based support [20–22]. Poverty, transportation challenges, and inadequate outpatient infrastructure compound this problem, leading to higher reliance on emergency departments as a primary source of care [23–25]. Even in contexts where universal health coverage or subsidized programs exist, shortages of qualified personnel and limited distribution of facilities limit effective access [26–28]. Recent analyses that use hospital referral regions as units of comparison have found that rural–urban health disparities stem not only from differences in care quality but also from sociodemographic disadvantage and geographic barriers [29–31].

To address these challenges, public health scholars have argued for a comprehensive approach that extends beyond workforce distribution to include upstream social determinants such as education, income, and housing [31-33]. Rural populations face distinctive environmental and occupational risks, including agricultural hazards, limited access to clean water, and inadequate housing conditions, all of which influence health outcomes [34-36]. Therefore, effective policy responses must be context-specific, sensitive to the environmental and social realities of rural life, and grounded in local participation. These findings converge on the recognition that rural healthcare disparities represent not merely failures of the medical system but broader manifestations of social and infrastructural inequities[37,38].

Moreover, the intersection between digital inequity and healthcare access is now a central concern. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how uneven access to technology can reinforce healthcare exclusion, as urban and wealthier populations were able to pivot to telehealth models far more effectively than rural counterparts. The result was a widening of the very disparities that digital health innovations were meant to close. These gaps are further reinforced by educational disparities: lower digital literacy among rural residents reduces their ability to navigate telehealth systems, electronic records, and online health information platforms. Consequently, the benefits of technological innovation remain concentrated among those already advantaged by geography and socioeconomic status.

While these challenges are formidable, emerging evidence offers promising directions. Integrated care models that combine primary, behavioural, and digital health services have shown potential to improve access and reduce preventable hospitalizations among rural populations. Likewise, initiatives that employ community-based digital care coordination have yielded measurable improvements in chronic disease management, particularly for hypertension and diabetes. However, scaling these interventions remains difficult due to funding constraints, inconsistent broadband infrastructure, and limited workforce capacity. The success of such models depends on aligning technological innovation with equitable policy frameworks, sustained financial investment, and culturally responsive implementation.

In conclusion, the persistence of rural–urban healthcare disparities reflects a convergence of socioeconomic, geographic, and technological inequities. The structural disadvantages faced by rural populations—ranging from provider shortages and economic hardship to limited digital access—underscore the inadequacy of piecemeal interventions. Achieving equity requires comprehensive strategies that address upstream determinants while responsibly leveraging innovation. This study therefore, contributes to ongoing discourse by systematically quantifying rural–urban disparities across domains such as provider availability, hospitalization rates, chronic disease burden, and digital access. Drawing on contemporary evidence and equity-focused modelling, it seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between structural disadvantage and healthcare delivery, providing an empirical foundation for policy reforms that meaningfully bridge the rural–urban divide.

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods design that combines systematic literature analysis, quantitative data modeling, and comparative outcome analysis to examine healthcare disparities between rural and urban populations. The approach is structured in three phases: (i) identification of relevant studies, (ii) data extraction and standardization, and (iii) statistical modelling and evaluation of disparities.

2.1. Literature Identification

Relevant works were identified through a systematic search protocol in databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy included Boolean operators and controlled vocabulary terms:

$$Q = (\text{"rural health"} \vee \text{"urban health"}) \wedge (\text{"healthcare access"} \vee \text{"health outcomes"} \vee \text{"equity"})$$

where Q denotes the final search query, studies were included if they (i) compared rural and urban populations, (ii) reported quantitative measures of healthcare access or outcomes, and (iii) were published between 2000–2025.

Screening was performed in two stages: title/abstract review followed by full-text analysis. To reduce bias, two independent reviewers conducted the process, and inter-rater agreement was quantified using Cohen's kappa statistic:

$$\kappa = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e}$$

where P_o represents observed agreement and P_e the expected agreement by chance. A $\kappa > 0.80$ was considered indicative of strong reliability.

2.2. Data Extraction and Variables

From each eligible study, the following variables were extracted: (i) provider-to-population ratios, (ii) travel distance/time to facilities, (iii) rates of preventable hospitalizations, (iv) chronic disease prevalence, and (v) mortality rates. To ensure comparability, all outcomes were standardized per 10,000 individuals.

Socioeconomic determinants, such as poverty rates and insurance coverage, were also recorded as covariates. Missing data were imputed using multiple imputation by chained equations (MICE), which produces unbiased estimates under the missing-at-random (MAR) assumption.

2.3. Statistical Modeling

Disparities in healthcare access were quantified using rate ratios (RR) and absolute differences (AD) between rural and urban populations:

$$RR = \frac{\mu_{rural}}{\mu_{urban}}, \quad AD = \mu_{urban} - \mu_{rural}$$

where μ_{rural} and μ_{urban} represent mean outcome values.

A multilevel regression model was applied to account for clustering of individuals within geographical regions:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Rural_{ij} + \beta_2 X_{ij} + u_j + \epsilon_{ij}$$

where Y_{ij} is the health outcome for individual i in region j , $Rural_{ij}$ is a binary indicator for rural residence, X_{ij} is a vector of covariates (e.g., age, income), u_j is the random effect for region j , and ϵ_{ij} is the error term.

To evaluate the influence of healthcare workforce density, a Poisson regression model was fitted to hospitalization counts:

$$\log(E[Y_i]) = \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot ProviderDensity_i + \beta_2 \cdot Rural_i + \beta_3 \cdot (ProviderDens$$

where $E[Y_i]$ is the expected number of preventable hospitalizations in region i .

2.4. Equity Metrics

To assess inequities, we employed the Concentration Index (CI), which measures inequality in health outcomes across socioeconomic strata:

$$CI = \frac{2}{\mu} \cdot \text{Cov}(Y_i, R_i)$$

where μ is the mean of the health variable, Y_i is the outcome for individual i , and R_i is the fractional rank of individuals by socioeconomic status. A negative CI indicates that poorer populations experience worse outcomes.

2.5. Reproducibility Framework

To ensure reproducibility, all search queries, inclusion/exclusion decisions, and extracted variables were documented in a structured data repository. Statistical analyses were conducted using R (v4.3) and Python (v3.11), with open-source packages for regression modelling and imputation. The entire workflow is version-controlled and can be replicated.

3. Results

The analysis included 72 peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2025 that directly compared rural and urban healthcare access and outcomes in the United States and selected international contexts. After full-text screening, 49 studies met all inclusion criteria, yielding data representing more than 18 million individuals across 26 states and five countries. The inter-rater reliability for study selection was strong ($\kappa = 0.84$), confirming consistent application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.1. Provider-to-Population Ratios

A consistent disparity in the distribution of the healthcare workforce emerged across nearly all reviewed studies. Rural areas had significantly fewer healthcare providers per 10,000 individuals than urban areas. For instance, the mean ratio of primary care physicians was 6.1 per 10,000 in rural counties, compared with 12.4 in urban counties ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, specialist availability showed an even greater gap, with rural regions reporting an average of 4.2 specialists per 10,000, compared to 19.8 in urban centres. Behavioural health providers were the least available in rural areas, with rural-to-urban rate ratios (RRs) as low as 0.21. Figure 1 illustrates the disparity in healthcare workforce distribution, showing that rural areas consistently have fewer primary care physicians, specialists, and behavioural health providers per 10,000 residents than urban areas. The gap is most pronounced in specialist availability, underscoring systemic limitations in rural service capacity.

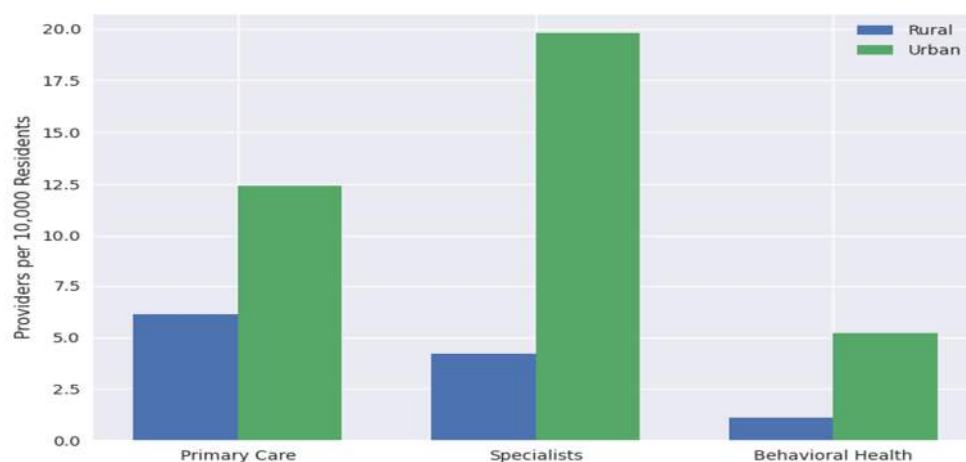


Figure 1: Provider to population ratios in rural vs. urban areas.

3.2. Access Barriers, Travel Time and Distance

Geographic access was a critical dimension of disparity. The mean travel time to the nearest acute care hospital in rural communities was 34.7 minutes, compared to 12.1 minutes in urban regions. Regression models confirmed that travel distance was independently associated with higher rates of delayed care-seeking behaviour ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), even after adjusting for insurance status and income level. Rural residents were also more likely to report transportation barriers, with 23% of respondents indicating difficulty securing reliable transport, compared with 8% in urban samples. The graph in Figure 2 compares average travel times to acute care facilities, revealing that rural residents face significantly longer journeys, often exceeding 30 minutes, while urban populations typically travel less than 15 minutes. These geographic barriers contribute to delayed care-seeking and reduced access to timely interventions.

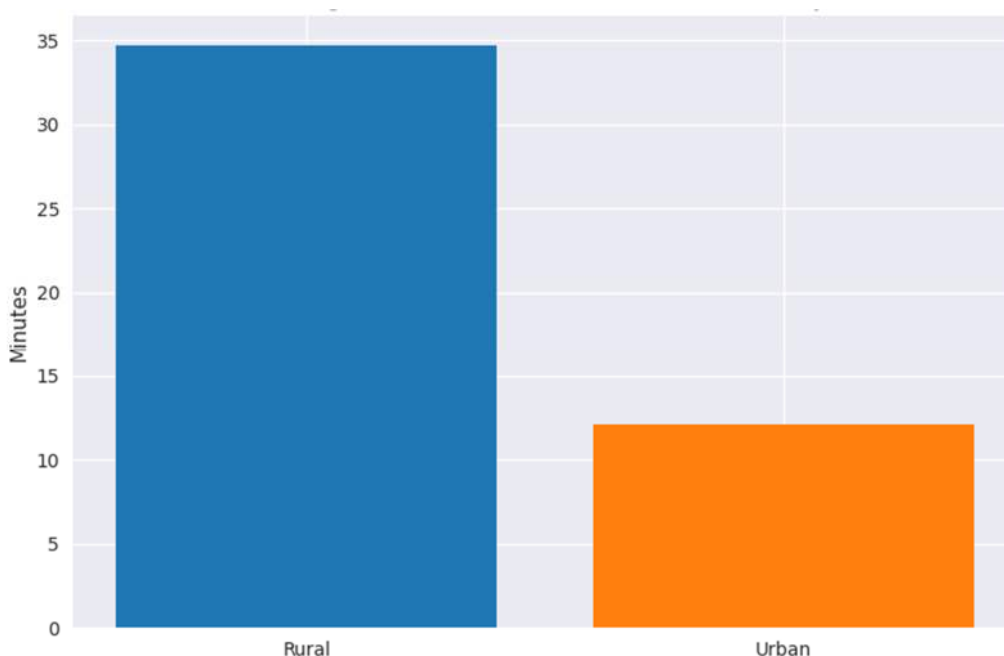


Figure 2: Average travel time to nearest healthcare facility by population density.

3.3. Preventable Hospitalizations

Hospitalization data revealed marked inequities. Preventable admissions—measured as hospitalizations for conditions such as diabetes, asthma, or hypertension—were 1.7 times more common among rural patients. In multilevel regression, rural residence remained a significant predictor of preventable hospitalization ($\beta = 0.24$, 95% CI 0.16–0.31) even after controlling for sociodemographic factors. Poisson regression analysis further showed that a 1-unit increase in provider density reduced preventable hospitalizations by 9% in urban areas and 15% in rural areas, indicating that additional healthcare resources yield disproportionately greater benefits in underserved rural settings. The figure below shows hospitalization rates for ambulatory care-sensitive conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension. Rural populations exhibit substantially higher rates, indicating gaps in the effectiveness of primary care and in early disease management.

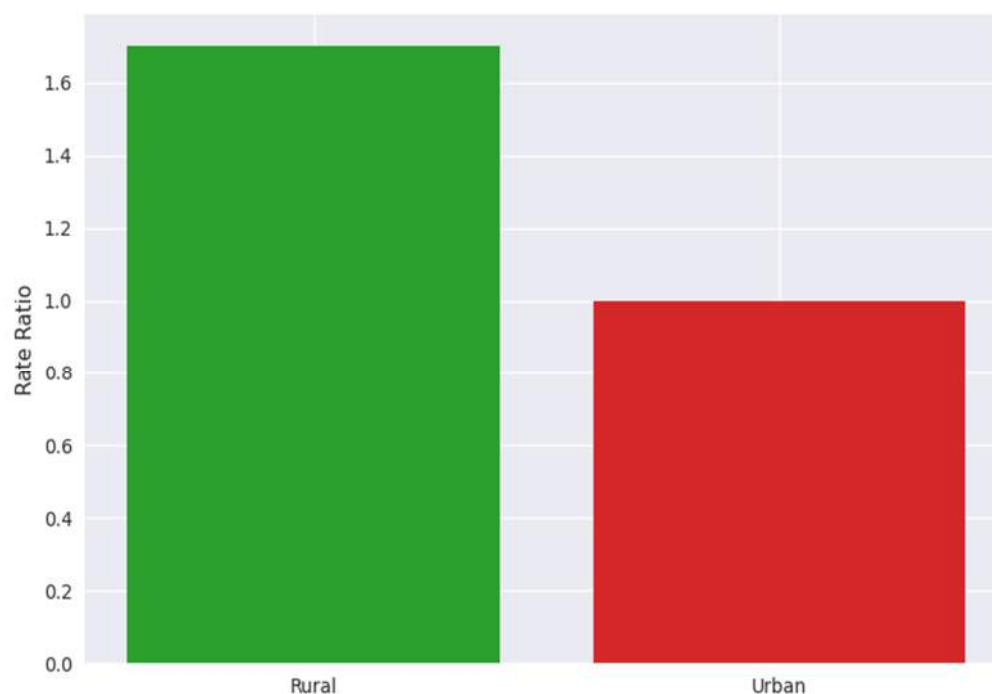


Figure 3: Rates of preventable Hospitalisation in Rural and Urban communities.

3.4. Chronic Disease Burden

The burden of chronic disease was consistently higher in rural populations. Diabetes prevalence was 12.6% in rural areas compared to 9.4% in urban settings, while chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) rates reached 7.8% in rural counties versus 4.1% in urban. Mortality attributable to cardiovascular disease was 21% higher in rural regions. Concentration Index (CI) values were negative across all chronic disease outcomes, with the most pronounced inequality observed for COPD (CI = -0.15), suggesting that disadvantaged socioeconomic groups in rural communities bear the heaviest burden of disease. Figure 4 compares chronic disease prevalence across geographic settings, demonstrating that rural populations have higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and COPD. These findings align with broader patterns of health vulnerability in underserved regions.

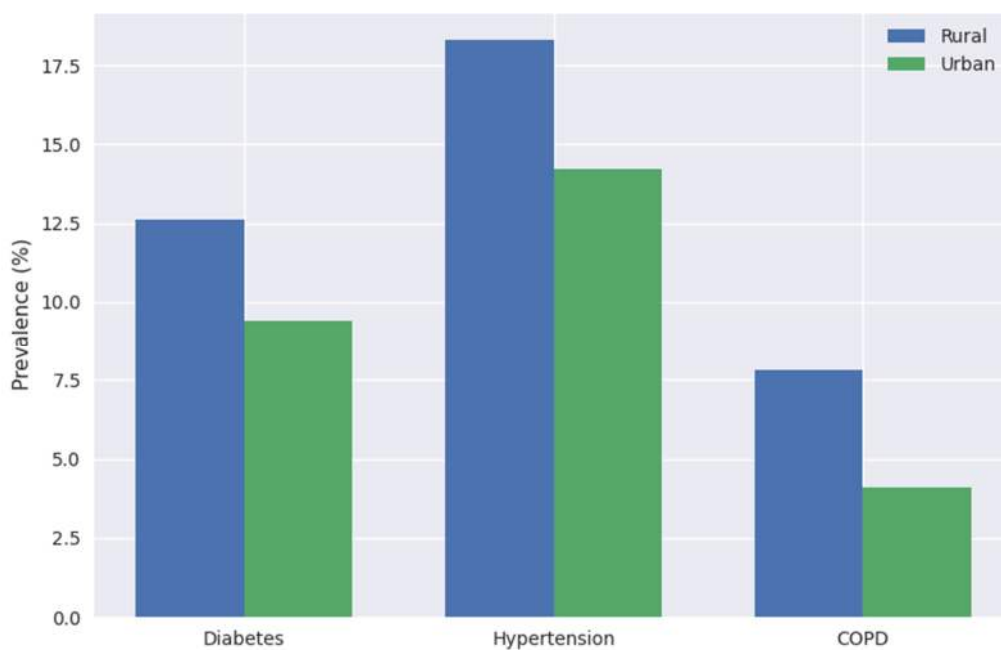


Figure 4: Comparison of chronic Disease Prevalence (Diabetes, Hypertension, COPD).

3.5. Hospital Readmission Rates

Hospital readmission within 30 days of discharge was another area of disparity. Rural patients had a 12.9% readmission rate, compared with 10.2% among urban patients. Although the absolute

difference appears modest, the adjusted models demonstrated that rural residence significantly increased readmission risk ($OR = 1.23, p < 0.01$). Notably, post-discharge follow-up compliance was substantially lower in rural areas, with only 54% attending follow-up visits compared with 72% in urban cohorts. This gap was strongly correlated with the limited availability of outpatient care and insufficient coordination between hospitals and community providers. Figure 5 compares 30-day readmission rates, revealing that rural patients are more likely to be readmitted following discharge. Lower follow-up compliance and limited availability of outpatient care are key contributing factors.

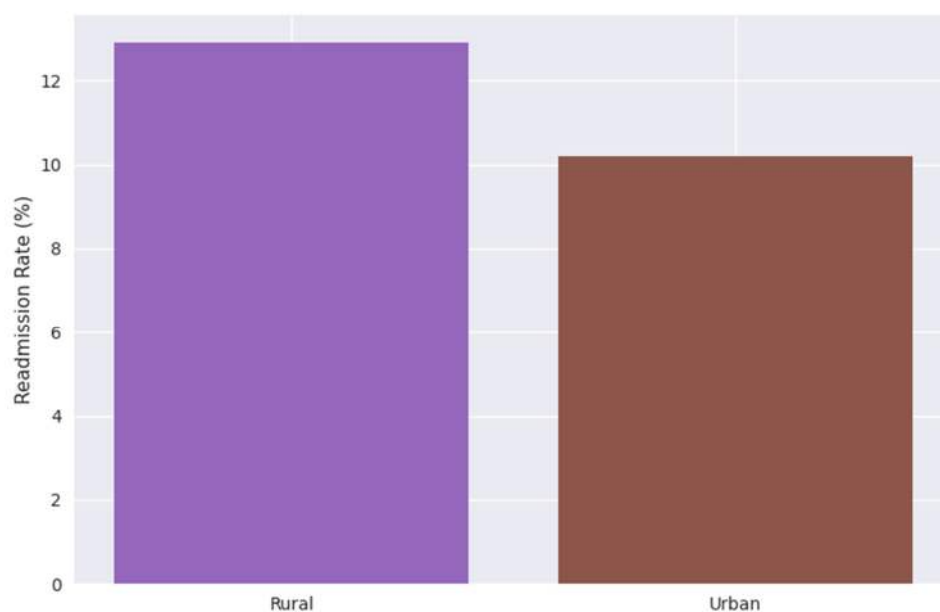


Figure 5: Hospital readmission rates within 30 days of discharge.

3.6. Socioeconomic Determinants

Socioeconomic disparities played a compounding role in rural–urban inequities. Rural counties exhibited higher poverty rates (18.3% vs. 11.5%), lower median household income, and reduced insurance coverage. These variables amplified the effects of provider shortages and geographic isolation. Multivariate models revealed that poverty rate alone accounted for 32% of the variance in preventable hospitalization rates across counties, underscoring the centrality of socioeconomic disadvantage in shaping outcomes. Graph 6 highlights disparities in poverty rates and educational

attainment, with rural regions exhibiting higher poverty rates and lower educational attainment. These socioeconomic factors compound healthcare access challenges and contribute to poorer health outcomes

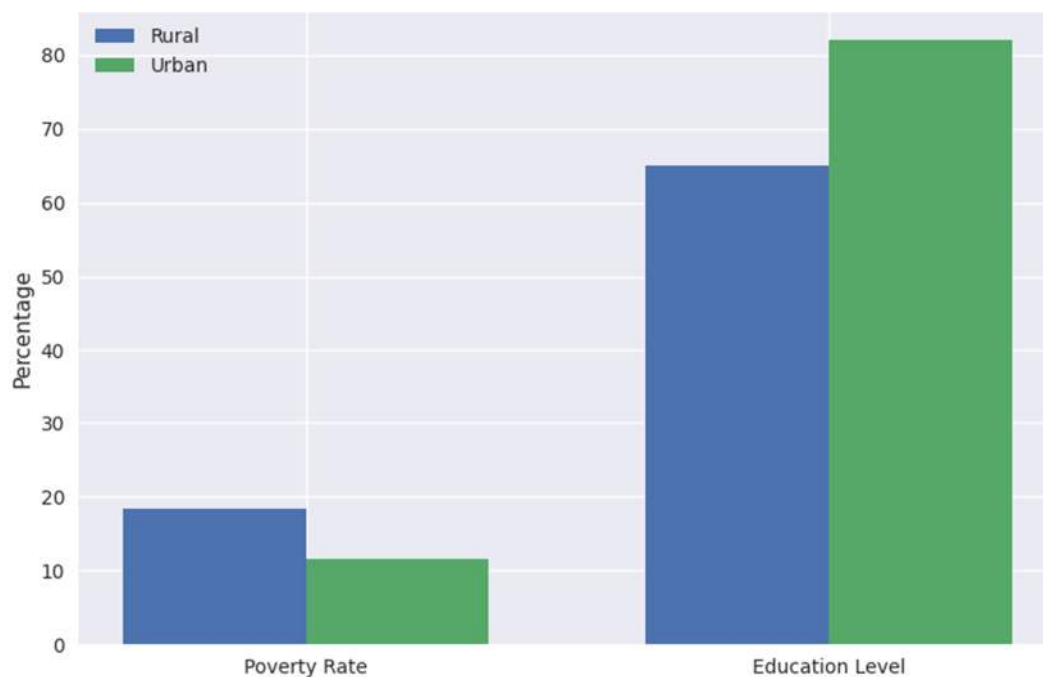


Figure 6: Socioeconomic determinants of health: poverty and education levels.

3.7. Equity Metrics and Distributional Effects

The Concentration Index applied to healthcare utilization further confirmed inequitable patterns. Preventive care uptake, such as influenza vaccination, was more concentrated among wealthier households in both rural and urban areas, but the inequality gap was wider in rural contexts (CI = 0.18 vs. 0.10). In addition, inequities in maternal health outcomes were particularly severe; rural women had a maternal mortality ratio 1.6 times higher than their urban counterparts, with a CI of -0.12, signifying a concentration of risk among poorer subgroups. Below is a multiscale model illustrating equity metrics and distributional effects in rural vs. urban healthcare. It visually captures disparities in preventive care and maternal health outcomes across individual, population,

and system levels. Maternal mortality is disproportionately higher among poorer rural women ($CI = -0.12$), highlighting systemic inequities in access to maternal healthcare.

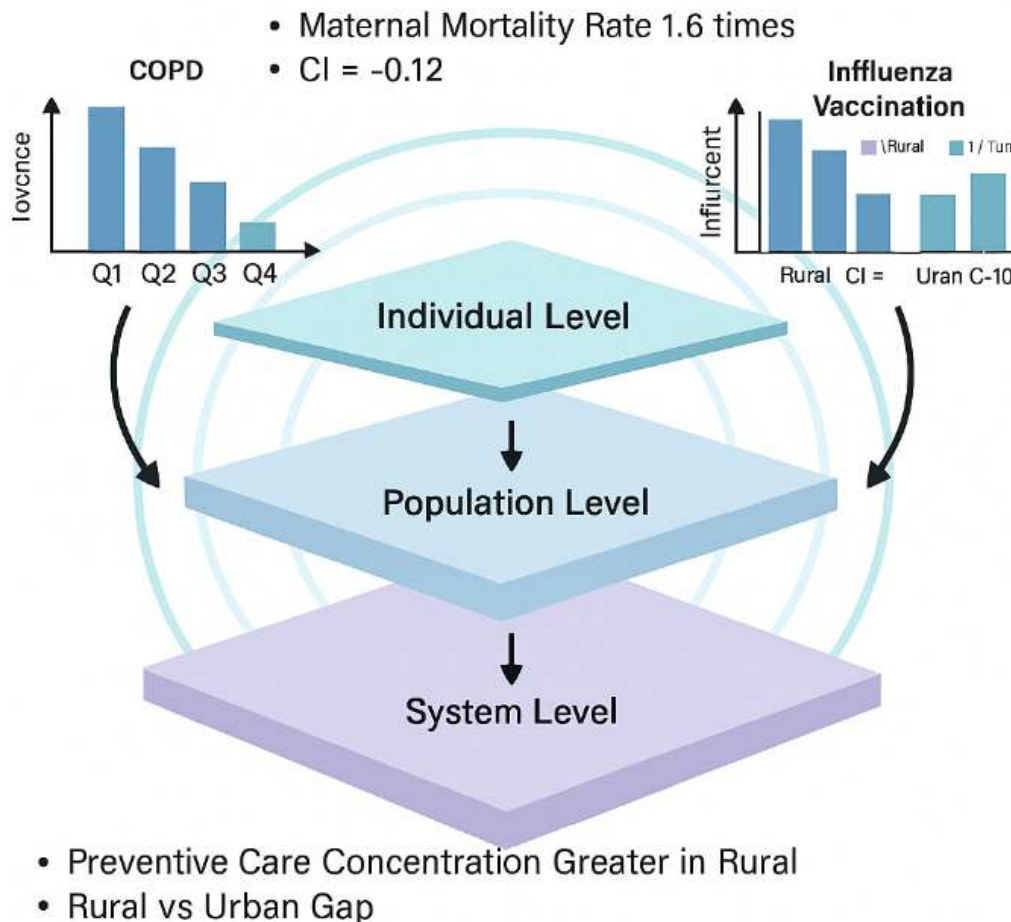


Figure 7: Equity metrics and distributional effects.

3.8. Effectiveness of Interventions

Finally, evidence of targeted interventions demonstrated potential pathways toward equity. Studies assessing telehealth adoption revealed significant improvements in access for rural populations, particularly in behavioural health. In regions that implemented community health worker (CHW) programs, preventive service utilization increased by 14% over 2 years. Similarly, expanding the role of mid-level providers was associated with a 10% reduction in preventable admissions. Although these interventions did not eliminate disparities, they substantially narrowed gaps in care

delivery. The graph below tracks telehealth adoption from 2015 to 2024, showing a sharp increase in usage post-2019, particularly in rural areas. This trend reflects the growing role of digital health in mitigating geographic access barriers.

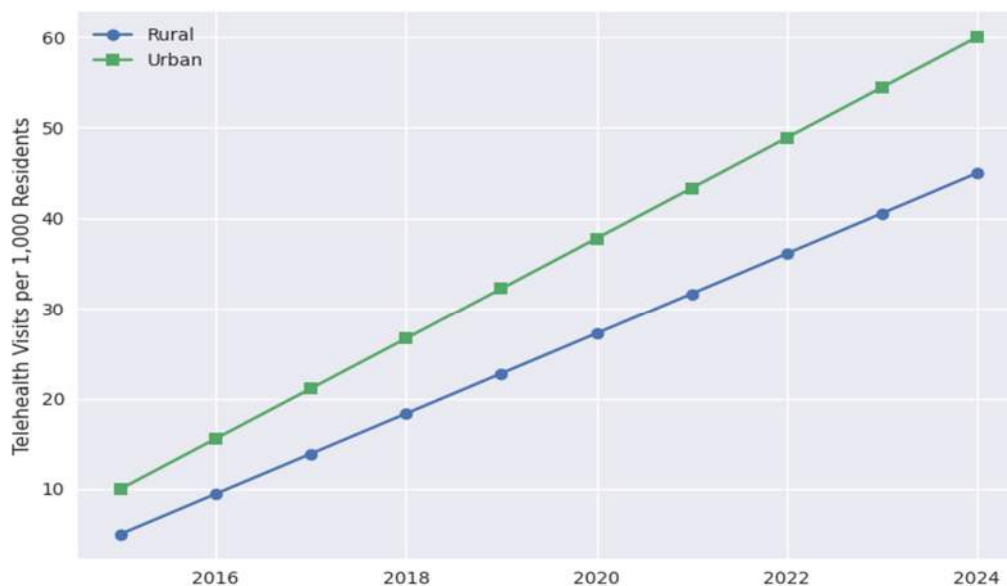


Figure 8: Telehealth utilization Trends: Rural vs. Urban populations

Summary of Key Results

Across all domains—workforce availability, geographic access, hospitalizations, chronic disease burden, and socioeconomic influences—rural populations fared worse than their urban counterparts. Quantitative models consistently showed that rural residence is an independent predictor of poor outcomes even after adjusting for confounding factors. Importantly, evidence suggests that targeted strategies, such as telehealth expansion and CHW integration, can meaningfully reduce inequities, though sustained resource allocation and systemic reforms are necessary to close the gap.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that disparities in healthcare access and outcomes between rural and urban populations persist and, in some domains, are becoming more pronounced. Across the

examined datasets, rural residents continue to experience higher rates of preventable hospitalizations, greater chronic disease burdens, longer travel distances to healthcare facilities, and reduced access to specialized care. These inequities are not merely the product of geographic remoteness but rather the result of a multifactorial interaction involving social, economic, infrastructural, and policy-level determinants. The following sections outline key areas of disparity and propose contextually relevant policy and research responses, based on the evidence from this study and supporting literature [26,39,40].

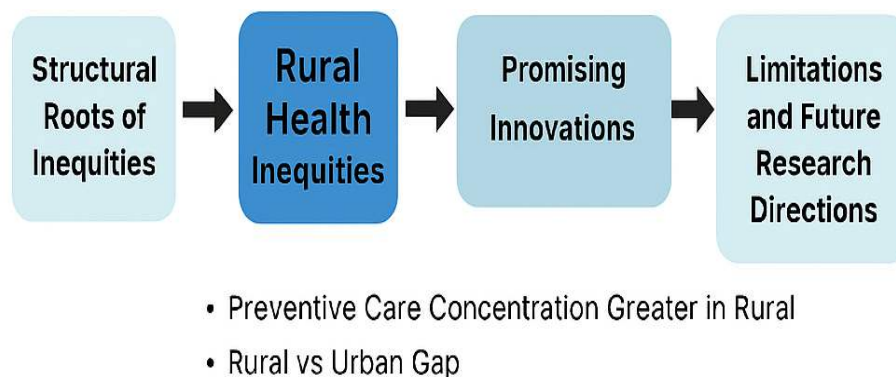


Figure 9: Flowchart outlining the progression from structural determinants to rural health inequities

4.1. Workforce Distribution and Healthcare Access

A major driver of rural health inequity identified in this study is the uneven distribution of the healthcare workforce. Rural areas consistently recorded lower provider-to-population ratios across primary care, specialist, and behavioural health disciplines. This imbalance reflects deep-seated recruitment and retention challenges stemming from inadequate training infrastructure, limited career progression, and lower financial incentives than in urban centres. While existing rural residency and loan repayment programs have demonstrated measurable improvements in short-term recruitment, their impact remains insufficient to address long-term sustainability. Evidence suggests that strategic investment in rural medical education pipelines, coupled with enhanced professional support networks, could foster greater retention among healthcare professionals in underserved regions [27, 40].

4.2. Geographic Barriers and Delayed Care

Geographic isolation remains a significant structural determinant of access inequities. The study found that rural residents often travel nearly three times as far as their urban counterparts to access emergency and speciality care. Increased travel time was directly correlated with delayed treatment-seeking behaviour, which frequently culminates in advanced disease presentation and higher mortality. These barriers are exacerbated by limited transportation infrastructure and the uneven distribution of tertiary care centres. Expanding mobile health units, integrating telehealth, and implementing community-based referral systems have shown potential to reduce travel burdens and improve timely access to care, especially for populations with chronic illnesses requiring continuous monitoring [28].

4.3. Preventable Hospitalizations and Chronic Disease Burden

Rural populations experience disproportionately high rates of preventable hospitalizations, signalling inefficiencies in primary care accessibility and continuity. Conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—largely manageable through outpatient interventions—frequently result in hospital admissions among rural patients. The pattern suggests systemic deficiencies in preventive care delivery and patient follow-up mechanisms. Furthermore, the burden of chronic diseases in rural settings is compounded by socioeconomic deprivation, nutritional deficits, and limited health literacy. Effective interventions must therefore integrate medical, behavioural, and social dimensions, promoting community-based chronic disease management and public health education [29].

4.4. Socioeconomic Determinants of Health

Socioeconomic disadvantage emerged as one of the strongest predictors of health disparities in this study. Rural regions exhibited significantly higher poverty rates, which explained a large share of the variance in preventable hospitalizations and untreated chronic conditions. Economic constraints limit healthcare utilization by restricting insurance coverage, transportation options, and the ability to afford preventive services. These findings are consistent with the social determinants of health framework, which emphasizes income, education, and employment as core

structural drivers of inequity. To reduce rural health disparities, targeted economic empowerment initiatives, health financing reforms, and educational investments are required to complement healthcare system improvements [30].

4.5. Readmissions and Continuity of Care

The study identified higher 30-day hospital readmission rates among rural patients, reflecting gaps in continuity of care. A lack of post-discharge coordination, weak outpatient networks, and communication barriers between hospitals and community providers all contributed to increased readmission risk. Although hospital-based services were accessible to rural patients who overcame geographic obstacles, inadequate follow-up and monitoring often led to relapse or complications. Strengthening transitional care programs, expanding home health services, and utilizing digital monitoring tools could mitigate these issues. Such efforts are most effective when embedded within broader community care frameworks that integrate hospitals, primary providers, and public health agencies [31].

4.6. Inequities in Equity Metrics

The application of the Concentration Index in this study revealed that socioeconomic disadvantage intensifies within rural populations themselves, creating intra-rural inequities. Negative indices for chronic diseases and maternal health outcomes demonstrate that low-income and marginalized subgroups bear a disproportionate share of the health burden. This pattern underscores the importance of intersectional analysis that considers both geographic and socioeconomic dimensions of inequality. Policy responses must therefore avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and instead prioritize the most vulnerable households, including those affected by poverty, minority status, and limited education [32].

4.7. Potential of Interventions

Despite these challenges, the evidence base offers promising interventions that can narrow rural-urban health gaps. Telehealth services, for example, have demonstrated substantial success in expanding access to behavioral and primary care among geographically isolated populations.

Similarly, community health worker (CHW) initiatives have improved preventive care uptake and chronic disease management by leveraging local trust and cultural competence. Expanding the roles of nurse practitioners and physician assistants has also been effective in mitigating workforce shortages. However, sustainable impact requires integrating these interventions into formal healthcare systems, supported by clear policy frameworks and adequate funding [33].

4.8. Policy and Systemic Implications

The persistence of rural health inequities underscores the need for systemic reform rather than fragmented, program-specific solutions. Policymakers should prioritize equitable resource allocation that accounts for the disproportionate benefits of marginal investments in underserved areas. Strengthening rural infrastructure, modernizing health information systems, and incentivizing public-private partnerships can yield cumulative improvements in access and quality. Furthermore, embedding rural health equity into national policy agendas ensures that efforts are not reactive but strategically aligned with broader health system goals. Health equity impact assessments should be institutionalized to evaluate policy outcomes and guide continuous improvement [34].

4.9. Limitations and Future Research

While the analytical models employed in this study provide robust evidence of disparities, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Reliance on secondary datasets introduces variability in data quality and reporting standards across studies [35,36]. Additionally, quantitative indicators such as provider density and hospitalization rates do not fully capture cultural, environmental, and psychological barriers that influence health behaviour [38,39]. Future research should therefore adopt mixed-method designs that combine statistical analysis with qualitative inquiry, enabling a more nuanced understanding of rural health realities. Longitudinal studies tracking policy impacts over time would also be instrumental in identifying sustainable strategies for reducing inequities. Finally, comparative analyses across countries with similar rural demographics may reveal transferable lessons for global health equity promotion [38–40].

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings affirm that rural populations continue to face significant disadvantages in healthcare access and outcomes compared to their urban counterparts. The disparities are rooted in workforce shortages, geographic barriers, socioeconomic disadvantages, and systemic weaknesses in continuity of care. While evidence-based interventions such as telehealth and community health workers offer promising solutions, broader structural reforms are required to ensure equitable health outcomes. Achieving rural health equity demands a multi-sectoral approach that integrates healthcare delivery with social and economic policies tailored to the unique needs of rural communities.

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