

Info Sheet How Can We Define Rural Palliative Care?

The challenges of providing palliative care in rural areas have been well described by rural health care providers. These include less access to resources and the time to travel the distances to provide home careⁱ. While these challenges have been clearly identified, there is no consensus in the health literature regarding the definition of the term “rural” (Bradshaw & Casebeer, 2001)ⁱⁱ.

Alberta Health & Wellness does not have a formal definition for the term “rural” but considers cities, towns and villages to be urban when looking at population ratios (*Municipal Government Act*, Sections 78-82). In many cases, municipalities and counties are generally considered rural for the same purposeⁱⁱⁱ.

The following table presents three definitions of “rural” that may be relevant for the palliative care population.

Indicator	Definition of “Rural”	Source
Population Density	Communities with 10,000 or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government of Alberta, Municipal Government Act, 1999^{iv} ▪ Canadian Medical Association, cited in Pitblado & Pong, 1999^v
Population Density & Economic Foundation	Communities with more than 10,000 populations but whose economic foundation is based upon primary production and processing, rural culture or tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Liberal Rural Caucus, cited in Bradshaw & Casebeer, 2001^{vi}
Population Density and Distance	<p>Rural and Small Town: Population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (i.e. outside the commuting zone of centres with population of 10,000 or more)</p> <p>Comments: Statistics Canada suggests that for each rural issue, analysts should consider whether it is a local, community or regional issue. The organization outlines that the appropriate definition should be determined by the question being addressed. The organization recommends using its “rural and small town” definition (as above) as a starting point or benchmark for understanding Canada rural’s population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statistics Canada, 2001^{vii}

As proximity to major centres may influence service utilization^{viii, ix} a provincial research team^x defined their rural research participants as follows:

- Living on a farm, acreage or in a village or town having a population less than 10, 000
- Place of residence greater than 35 kilometers from a major urban centre (population \geq 10 000)

Participants residing \leq 35 kilometers from the outer boundaries of major urban centers (population $>$ 10 000), were considered urban residents.

End Notes

ⁱ Rural Palliative Home Care Project. (2001). *A rural palliative home care model: The development and evaluation of an integrated palliative care program in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island- A federal health transition fund project report*. Truro, NS: Communications Nova Scotia.

ⁱⁱ Bradshaw, C., & Casebeer, A. (2001). *Mistahia health services utilization project – A review of the literature on rural health status & health services utilization*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Centre for Health Services and Utilization Research. Available on the World Wide Web at http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/system/key/research/mistahia_lit_review.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Electronic response from Alberta Health & Wellness on January 29, 2003 by contacting <http://www.albertaconnects.gov.ab.ca>

^{iv} Government of Alberta. (1999). *Municipal Government Act, Chapter M-26, Part 4, Statutes of Alberta: Consolidated to June 9, 1999*. Edmonton, AB: Queen's Printer for Alberta. Available on the World Wide Web at

<http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca>

^v Pitblado, R., & Pong, R. (1999). *Geographic distribution of physicians in Canada*. Sudbury, ON: Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research, Laurentian University. Retrieved by Bradshaw & Casebeer, note ii.

^{vi} Bradshaw & Casebeer, note ii.

^{vii} Statistics Canada. (2001). Definitions of rural. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin*, 3, (3), Catalogue no. 21-006-XIE2001003. Information retrieved by Connie Yamabe, Community Care Coordinator, Palliative Home Care, Chinook Health Region. Available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/IPS/Data/21-006-XIE2001003.htm>

^{viii} Lucas, C.A., & Rosenthal, T.C. (1992). Access to health care in rural New York State. *New York State Journal of Medicine*, 92, 465-8. Retrieved by Vik et al., note x.

^{ix} Ramachandran, H., & Shastri, G.S. (1983). Movement for medical treatment - A study in contact patterns of rural population. *Social Science & Medicine*, 17, (3), 177-87. Retrieved by Vik et al., note x.

^x Vik, S.A., Maxwell, C.J., Hogan, D.B., Patten, S.B., Johnson, J.A., Mitchell, C., & Romonko-Slack, L. (2003). *Determinants and health related outcomes associated with nonadherence to prescribed drug regimens: A comparison of rural and urban home care clients- Working paper submitted to the Institute of Health Economics, January 2003*. Calgary, AB: Authors.

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