

Rural Communities Need Alzheimer's Treatments Now More than Ever

See What the Experts Are Saying



With fewer local pharmacies, doctors, and specialty care like neurology, nearby, rural communities in the U.S. face unique healthcare challenges that negatively impact patient health outcomes for people living there. For patients and families battling Alzheimer's and related dementias in those areas, this is particularly devastating.

“Across the country, people living in rural areas are nearly twice as likely to die from Alzheimer's as those living in urban areas. And research by the University of Iowa found that agricultural workers are 46% more likely to develop dementia. At the same time, these communities have diminished access to effective treatments for these conditions.”

[Pennsylvania State Grange President Matthew Espenshade](#)

“Those who live in rural Appalachia, in particular, are both much more disadvantaged on the whole from a socioeconomic perspective and have a higher burden of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders compared to those who live elsewhere. It's a double whammy.”

[Ohio State's College of Public Health Assistant Professor of Epidemiology Jeffrey Wing](#)

While this fatal disease is more prevalent in rural communities, **fewer rural patients** are seeing neurologists for dementia compared to those in more urban areas.

“What's troubling is that there are longstanding, socioeconomic disparities and also geographic disparities in access to specialized care. And what we're seeing is those disparities still apply here in this population.”

[University of Minnesota's School of Public Health Assistant Professor Sayeh Nikpay](#)

“Neurologists in the United States are not evenly spread out, which affects whether patients can see a neurologist for certain conditions like dementia and stroke... some areas of the country have up to four times as many neurologists as the lowest served areas, and these differences mean that some people do not have access to neurologists who are specially trained in treating brain diseases.”

[University of Michigan in Ann Arbor Researcher and American Academy of Neurology Fellow Brian C. Callaghan, MD, MS](#)

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"We are facing an increasing demand for physicians who can meet the needs of people with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias as the number of people diagnosed is rising... Given this added burden of access in rural and minoritized populations, we need to better understand the barriers people face in accessing care so we can help them achieve better dementia outcomes."

Washington State University's
Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine
Researcher Solmaz Amiri

"It's frustrating to me as a professional that we don't have many geriatric physicians in our areas and neurologists in our areas, much less an actual dementia center ... the people who live here feel that people in rural areas get left out and forgotten about sometimes."

Alzheimer's Association
Greater Cincinnati
Chapter Program Director
Melissa Dever

"There's something happening in the rural context that is elevating the risk for dementia. And, unfortunately, a lot of the solutions are being conceived in urban centers, so this presents an opportunity for us to implement community participatory methods where solutions for rural, come from rural."

University of Minnesota Medical
School's Memory Keepers
Medical Discovery Team
Member Kristen Jacklin, PhD

Adding to these issues is the fact that Alzheimer's is the only disease with FDA-approved treatments that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has a burdensome "Coverage with Evidence Development" (CED) policy. This requires patients to participate in clinical studies to gain coverage, making it even more difficult for rural patients to access the treatments they need.

"Clinical research just doesn't reach rural areas. Very few new drug trials or studies, or research studies with early diagnosis or biomarkers. There's a lot of things that our rural patients miss out on because they are just simply overlooked when it comes to these research trials."

University of Florida's Division of Geriatric
Medicine Dr. Jamie Bass



This CED policy adversely impacts already underserved populations. If policymakers at CMS want to help rural Americans, the agency should reconsider this barrier to approved treatments. Rural Americans deserve better.



To learn more about Alzheimer's access issues, visit the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease's "[The Fight For Alzheimer's](https://pfcidalz.org)" website at pfcidalz.org.