

Missouri Economy Indicators

Missouri Rural Health Care Access

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Access to health care resources varies between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan regions of Missouri. From 2010 to 2018, the state's number of primary care physicians per 100,000 people increased in metro areas, but it declined in nonmetro regions. Metro areas had 30 more primary care physicians per 100,000 people than their nonmetro counterparts in 2018. A lack of hospitals was also a challenge for many nonmetro counties, specifically those in northeast and southeast Missouri.

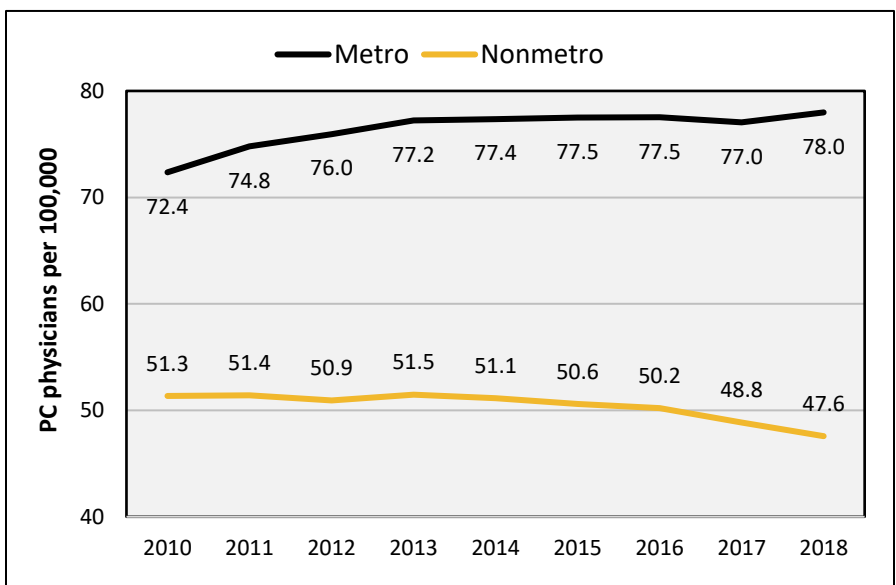
Physician Access

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) tracks data about health care professionals, their practices and where they work.

The graph shows the number of primary care physicians per 100,000 people in metro and nonmetro Missouri counties.

Primary care physicians include physicians practicing in general family medicine, general practice, general internal medicine and general pediatrics.

Missouri Primary Care (PC) Physicians per 100,000 People



Author's chart using data from HRSA Area Health Resource Files, 2021

Primary Care Physicians Less Likely to Serve Nonmetro Areas

Access to primary care physicians affects a population's health outcomes. [A 2019 study](#) cited that having fewer primary care physicians per capita has been associated with lower life expectancy. Within Missouri, primary care health care resources are distributed unevenly across metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas.

In 2018, Missouri metro counties had 78 primary care physicians for every 100,000 people. Comparatively, nonmetro counties had only 47 primary care physicians per 100,000 people. When compared to the U.S., Missouri has fewer primary care physicians in nonmetro and metro areas. The U.S. averaged 80 primary care physicians per 100,000 people in metro areas and 52 primary care physicians per 100,000 in nonmetro areas.

Over time, the metro and nonmetro primary care provider gap has widened. From 2010 to 2018, the number of primary care physicians increased by 5.6 physicians per 100,000 people. In rural areas, the number of primary care physicians decreased by 3.7 physicians per 100,000 people.

HRSA tracks where health care providers work and assigns areas with a population-to-provider ratio of at least 3,500-to-1 as *Health Professional Shortage Areas*. Seven rural Missouri counties are fully designated as primary care *Health Professional Shortage Areas*: Chariton, Daviess, Hickory, Holt, Iron, Lewis, Mercer and Shelby.

Fewer Health Care Facilities Operate in Rural Areas of Missouri

Access to health care facilities is also unevenly distributed across the state. The rural Missouri hospital locations map shows the northeast and south central regions have clusters of four to five counties without a hospital. Furthermore, only 20 of the 166 hospital locations in Missouri are in nonmetro counties.

The number of rural hospitals has continued to decline. The Missouri Hospital Association reported that [10 rural hospitals in the state closed](#) between 2014 and 2019. Most of these closures were due to financial challenges.

Additional Resources

- **The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, provides an interactive map of rural hospital closures throughout the U.S.: shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/rural-health/rural-hospital-closures.
- **The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration’s Area Health Resource Files** provide an interactive map of various health care professionals per capita across the U.S.: data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/ahrf.
- **Missouri Telehealth Network Show-Me ECHO** employs telemedicine technology to reach and train rural primary care providers and other professionals. Learn more at showmeecho.org.

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at tinyurl.com/ExceedEconomyIndicators

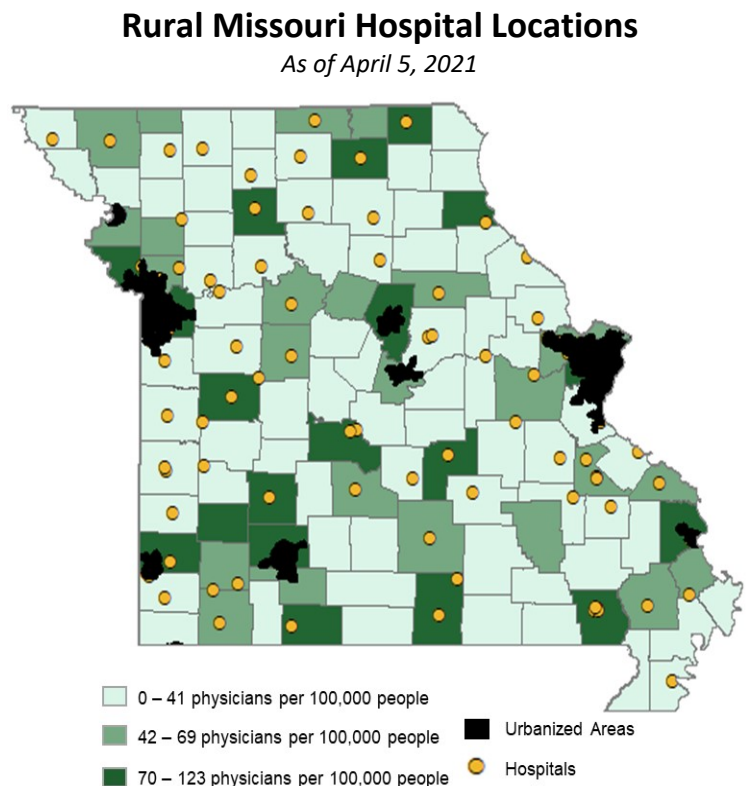
Author: Maria Kuhns, Exceed Graduate Research Assistant, kuhnsm@mail.missouri.edu



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Exceed map using U.S. DHS Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level data