



The American Opioid Epidemic in Special Populations: Five Examples

The American Opioid Epidemic has become a national crisis, with rural populations disproportionately affected. This report examines five examples of the epidemic in special populations: rural communities, Native American populations, military veterans, incarcerated individuals, and the elderly. Each example highlights the unique challenges and potential solutions for these groups. The report also discusses the importance of rural populations in the overall epidemic and the need for targeted interventions.

The Importance of Rural Populations

Drug use in rural areas has increased significantly since 1999, with a 325% increase in 2015. In 1999, 87% of rural counties had a physician with a Drug Addiction Treatment Act (DATA) 2000 waiver, which allows them to prescribe MOUD. By 2014, this percentage had dropped to 87%, and in 2017, it had fallen to 56%. This lack of access to MOUD is a major barrier to treatment for rural populations.

In 2017, 56% of rural counties lacked a physician with a Drug Addiction Treatment Act (DATA) 2000 waiver which allows them to prescribe MOUD.

Promising Approaches for Rural Populations

These findings suggest that rural populations may benefit from a combination of strategies, including community-based interventions, telehealth, and targeted outreach. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report highlights the importance of addressing the unique needs of rural communities, such as limited access to healthcare and social services. Key findings include the need for increased funding for rural health care, the importance of community-based organizations, and the potential of telehealth to improve access to care. The report also emphasizes the need for a coordinated effort across federal agencies to address the opioid crisis in rural areas.

Research and Action Priorities for Rural Populations

Key research and action priorities for rural populations include: (1) Improving access to healthcare services, (2) Addressing social determinants of health, (3) Enhancing community-based interventions, (4) Expanding telehealth services, and (5) Strengthening rural health care workforce. The NASEM report provides a detailed overview of these priorities and offers recommendations for how to address them. The report also highlights the need for ongoing research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of these interventions in rural settings.

SOURCE: Baker, C., M. M. A., A. B., K. D., C. H. I., C. M. J., R. A. A. C. 2020. *Addressing the Opioid Crisis in Rural Populations*. National Academies Press, Washington, DC. <https://doi.org/10.31478/202010>

DISCLAIMER: The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, *Addressing the Opioid Crisis in Rural Populations*, is a product of the National Academies Press (NAP). The report is not intended to be used for promotional purposes. The report is available for free download at [nam.edu](https://www.nam.edu).

Download the full publication at nam.edu/OpioidCollaborative