

Jan. 2, 2020

Health disparities between urban and rural areas have grown

BY TUCKER DOHERTY, POLITICO PRO DATAPOINT

According to a new report compiled by researchers from the National Center for Health Statistics and Texas A&M University, differences between urban and rural areas on several key health indicators have increased in the past decade.

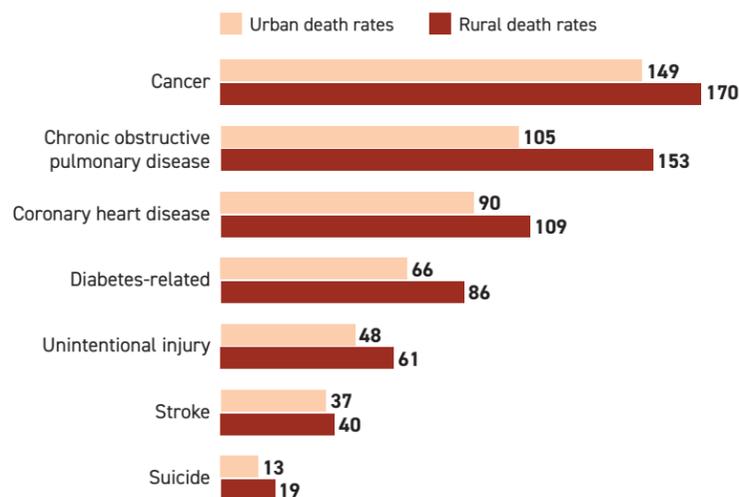
The study evaluated trends in death rates at the national and regional levels, focusing on seven major causes targeted by Healthy People 2020, a HHS initiative that set specific reduction targets for each condition.

The researchers found that overall, urban areas had met their targets on three of the seven causes — coronary heart disease, cancer, and diabetes-related deaths — whereas rural areas had met none of their targets. Additionally, for both urban and rural areas, deaths due to unintentional injury and suicide had increased.

In assessing the underlying causes, the researchers suggested that poverty in rural areas could be driving some of the trend. The report called on policymakers to consider regional and urban-rural disparities in future initiatives.

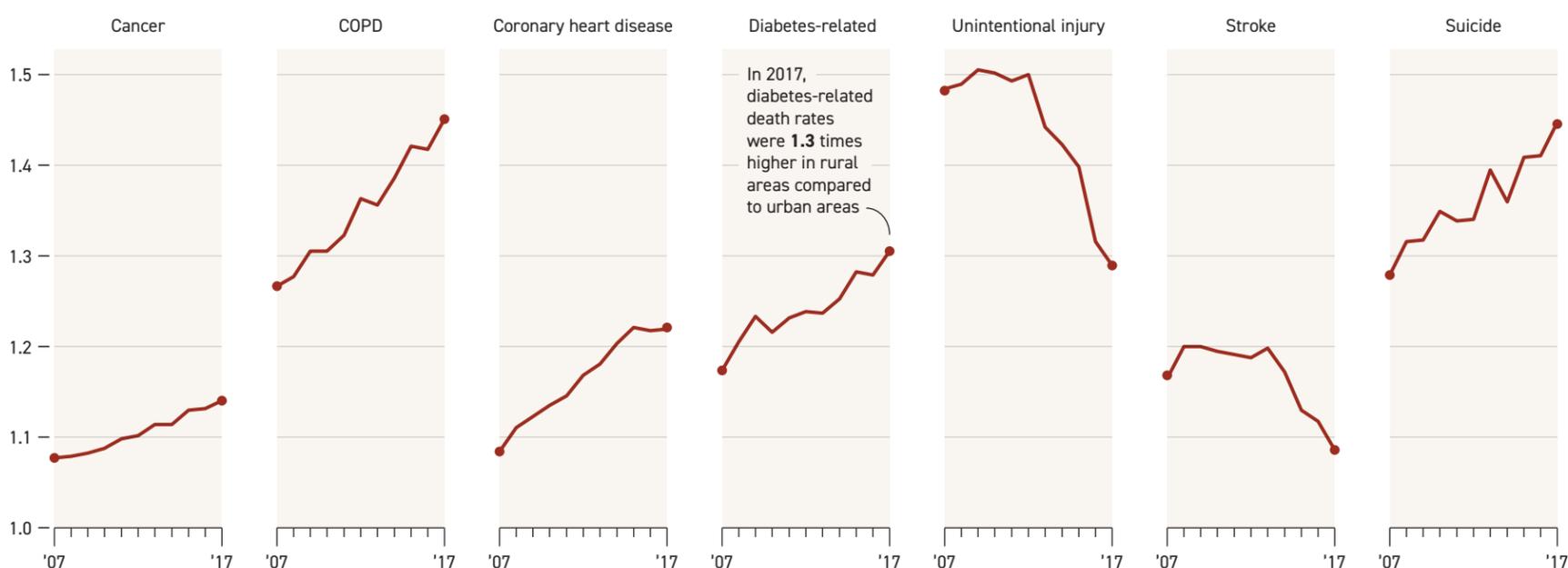
Rural residents at greater risk of death

Urban and rural death rates per 100,000 population for 7 selected major causes, age-adjusted, 2017



For 5 of the 7 causes of death tracked, rural-urban disparities have increased

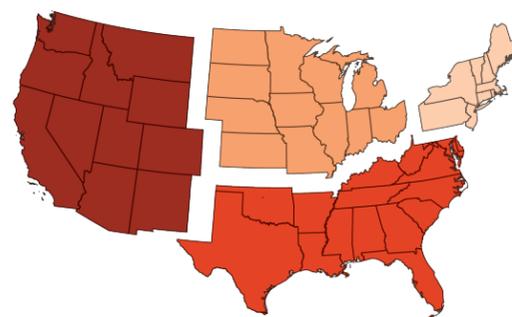
RATIO OF RURAL TO URBAN DEATH RATES, FOR 7 SELECTED MAJOR CAUSES OF DEATH



Rural trends varied greatly by region and cause of death

In addition to assessing nationwide trends, the researchers also looked at differences according to census region. According to their analysis, the urban Northeast fared best — meeting six out of seven targets — while the rural South met no targets and had made the least progress overall.

Regional trends in rural areas varied greatly by cause of death. Rural death rates for cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke fell in all four regions, while suicide and unintentional injury deaths increased across the board. Rural progress on COPD and diabetes-related deaths varied, with some regions seeing increases and others seeing decreases.



Average annual change in rural death rate by census region, 2007 to 2017

