



Looking Beyond Health Care: The Importance of the Social Determinants of Health for Rural Aging

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Social Determinants of Health

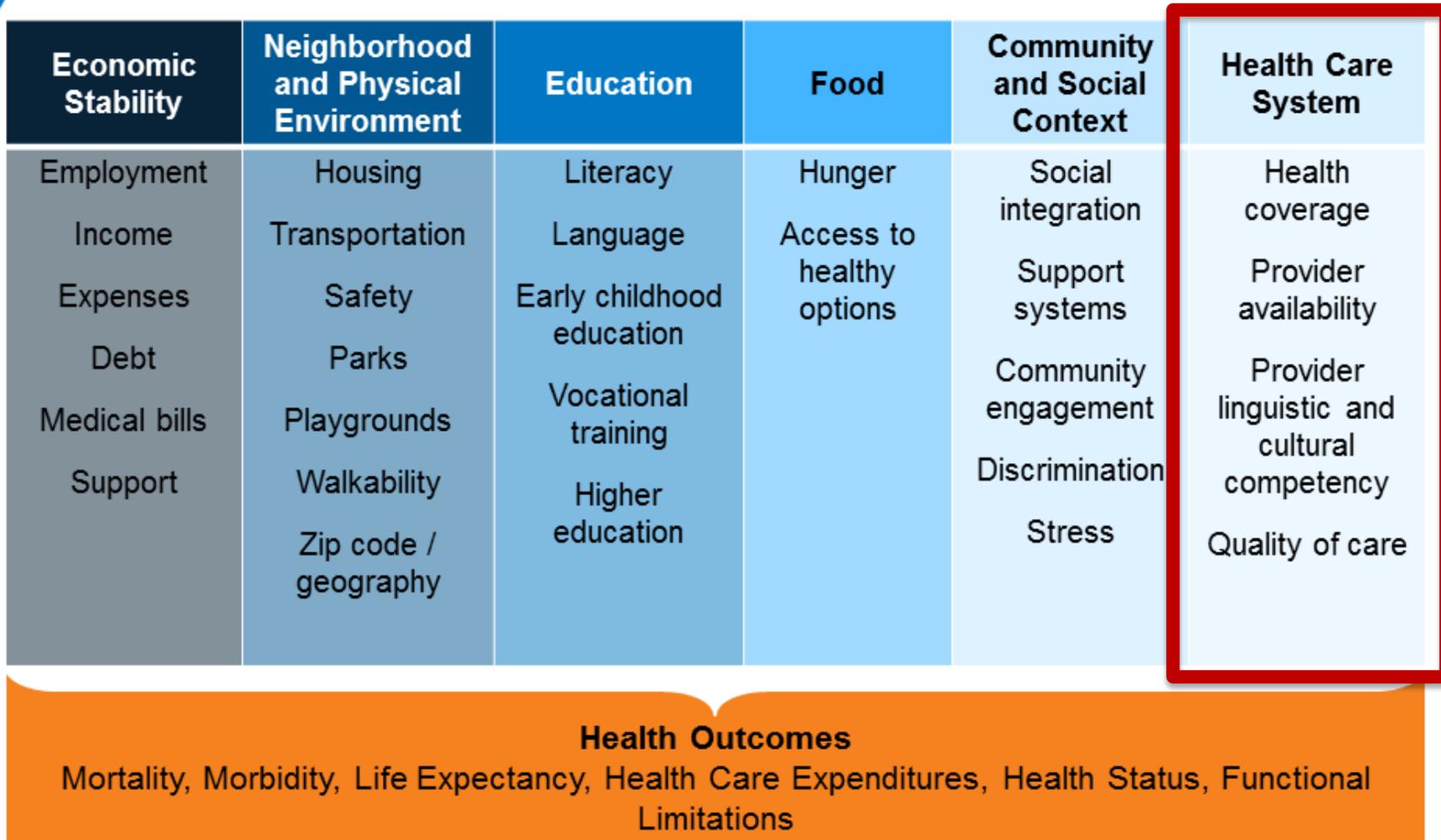
“The social determinants of health (SDH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.

These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems.”

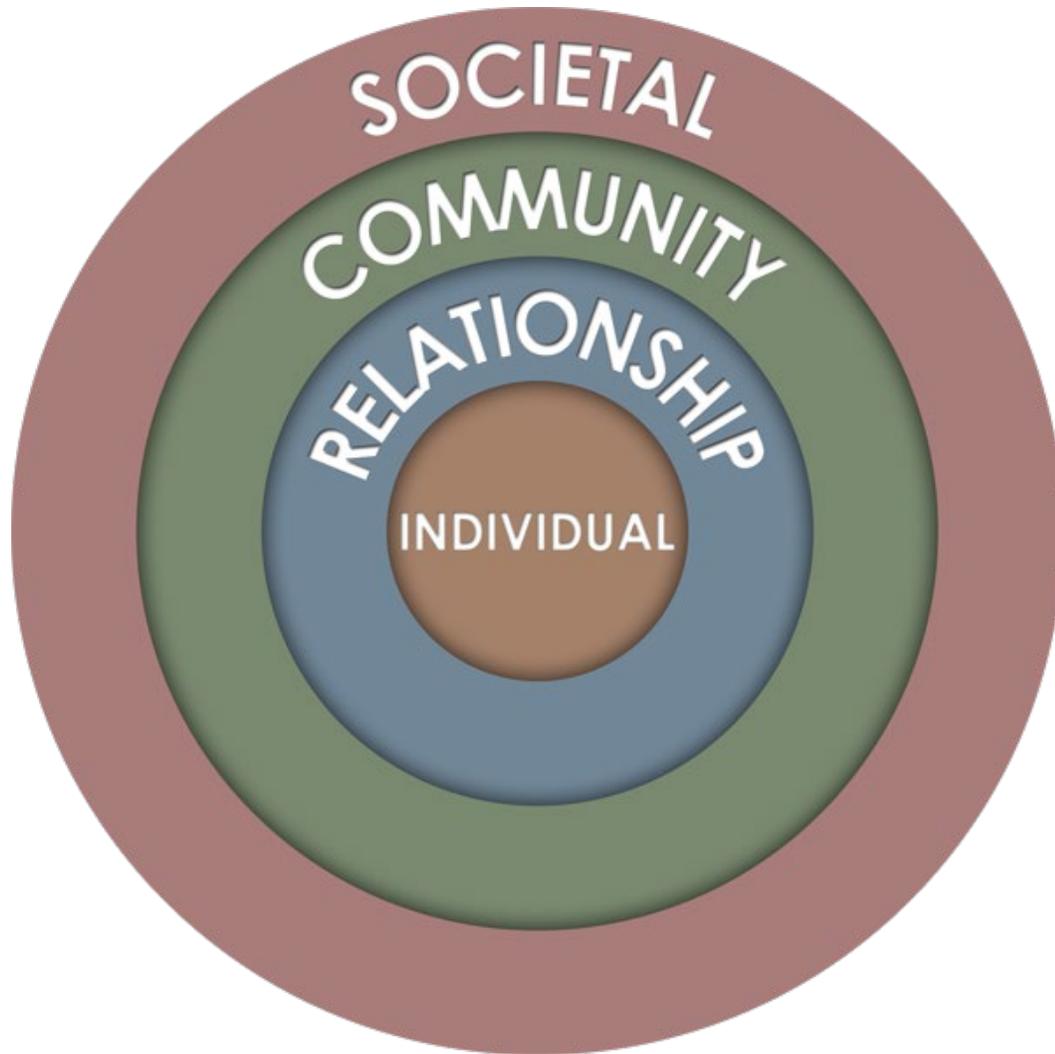
- World Health Organization Definition

Figure 1

Social Determinants of Health



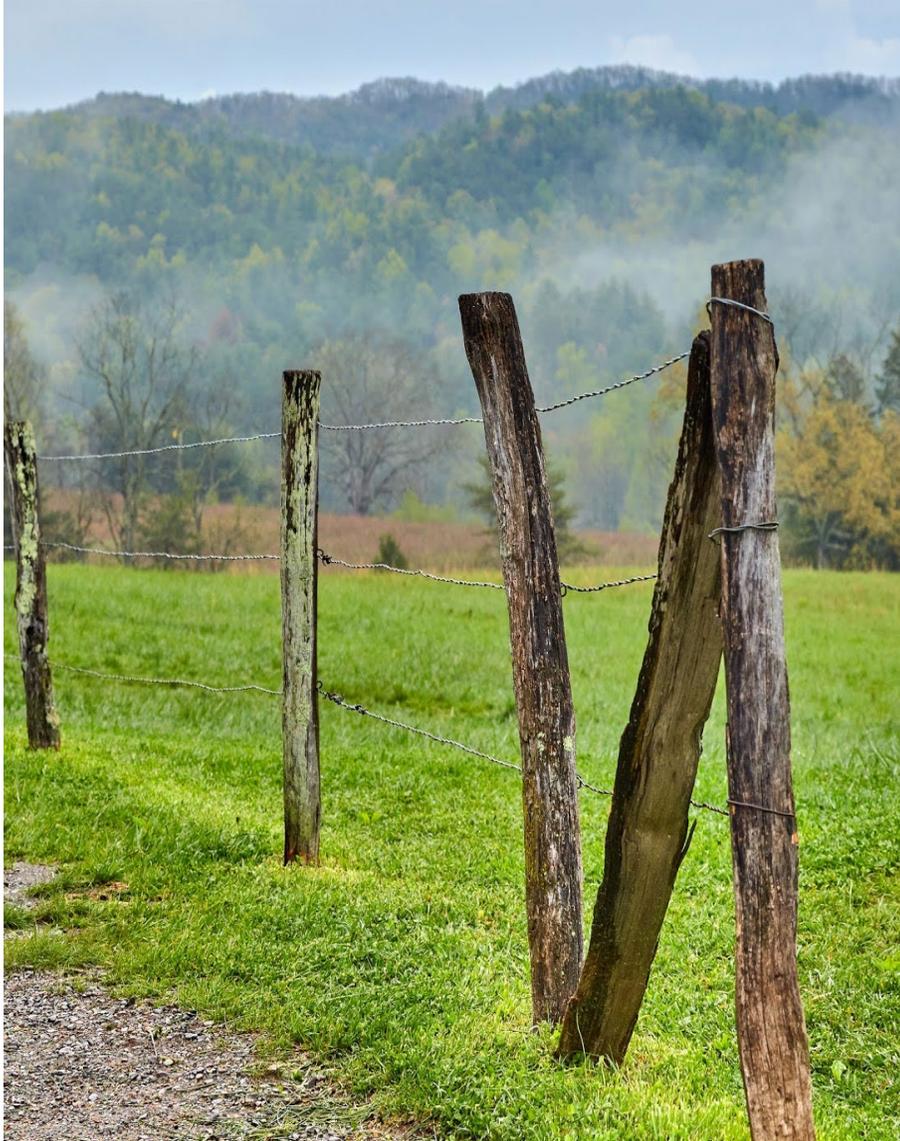
Put Another Way...



- Person in environment
- Socio-ecological model

- Health in all policies

Social Determinants of Health and Older Adults



- Exposure over the life course
- Cumulative advantage/disadvantage (Dannefer, 2003)
- Shape opportunities over the lifespan and living situation and economic position in older ages

Photo Credit: Kathleen Henning

Social Determinants of Health and Rural

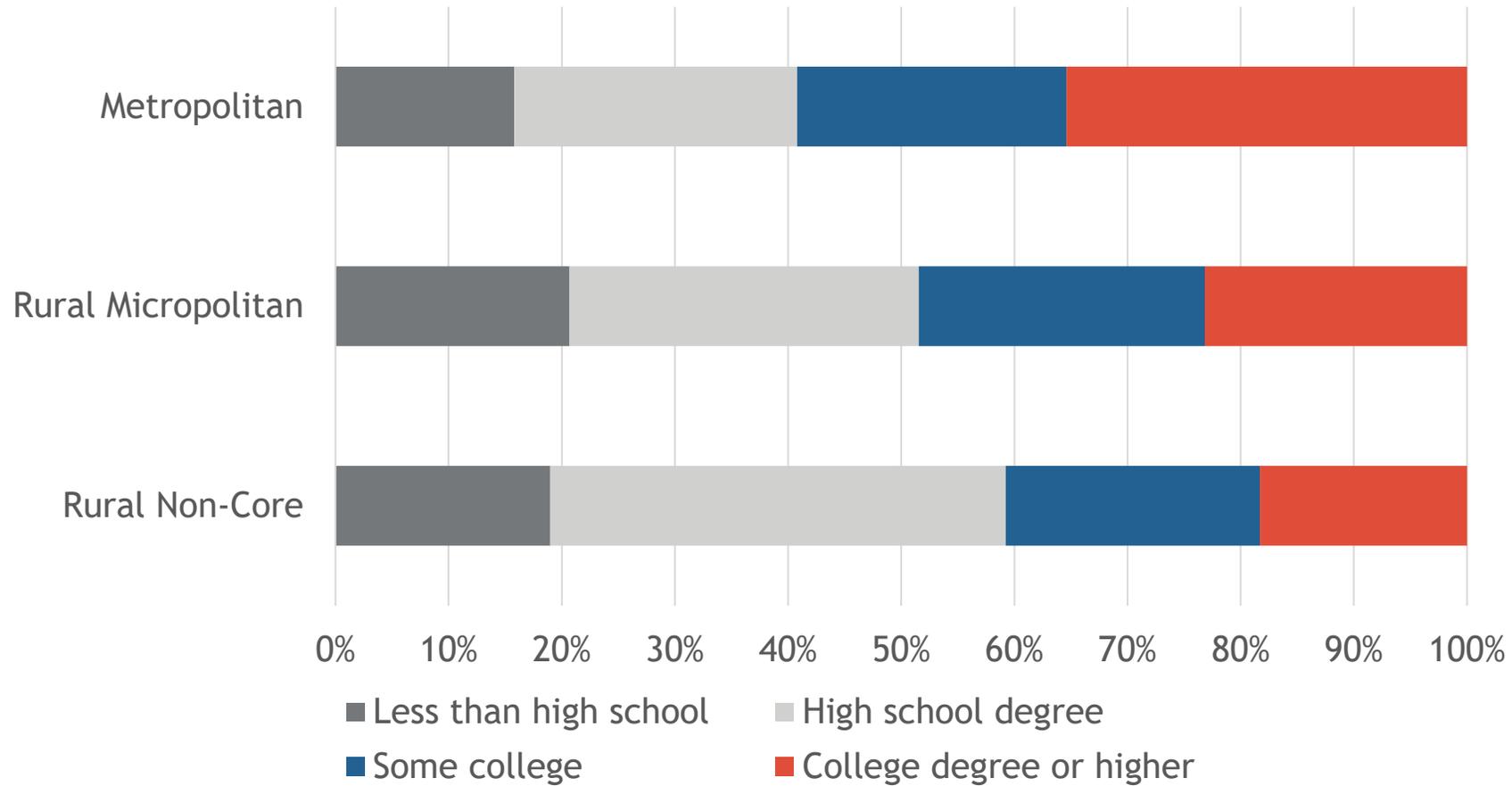


- Rural residents are: “older, poorer, and sicker”
- Rural areas differ from urban in terms of infrastructure, environment, socio-demographic characteristics, access to resources, etc.
- Important to consider the unique impact of social determinants of health on rural older adults

Rural Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics

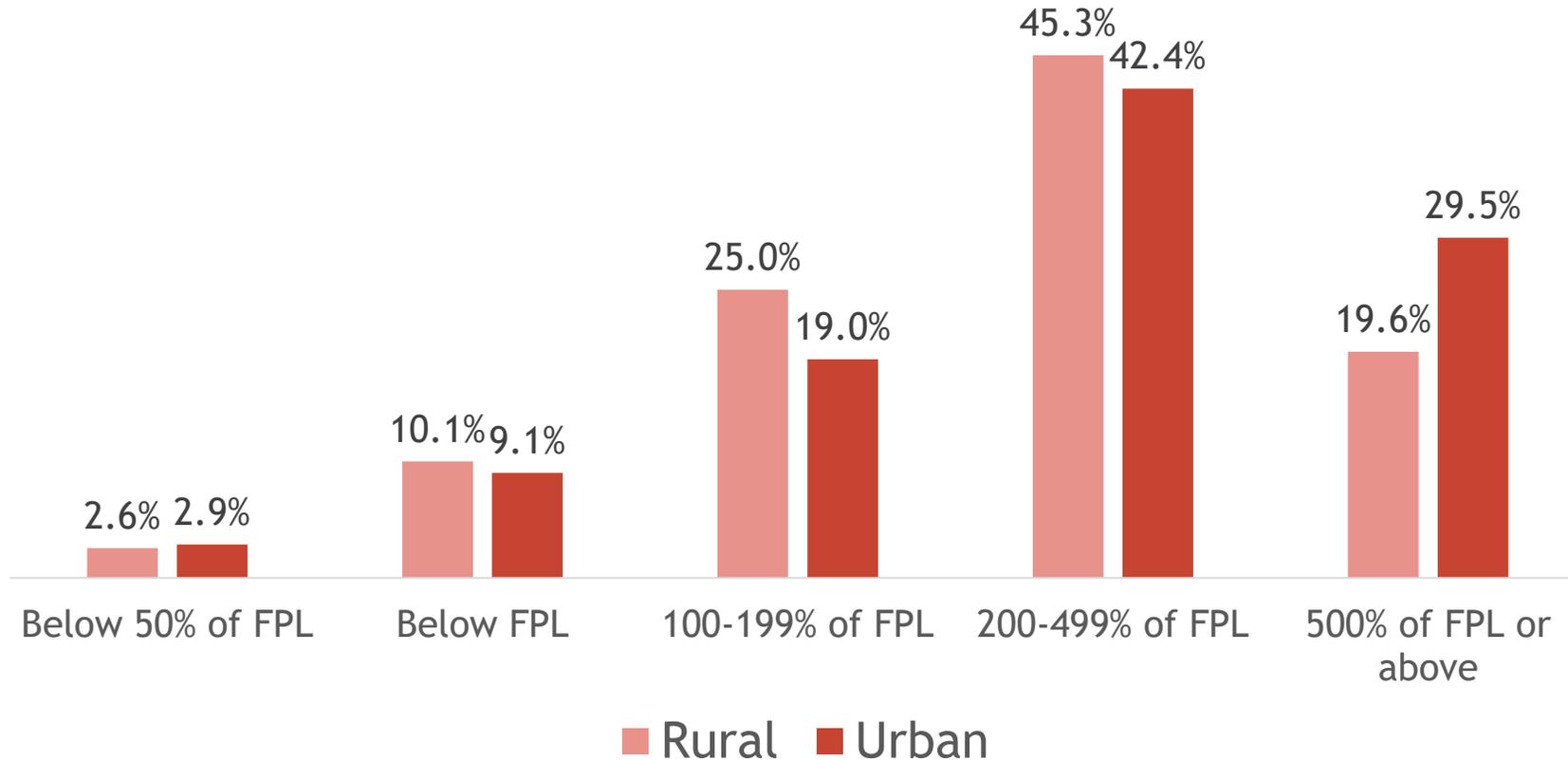
- Compared to urban, rural residents:
 - Are older (on average)
 - Have lower educational attainment
 - Have lower incomes
 - Have higher unemployment rates
 - Have lower health insurance rates
 - Are more likely to work (or to have worked) in physically demanding jobs
- Each of these is associated with poorer health outcomes

Educational Attainment by Rurality



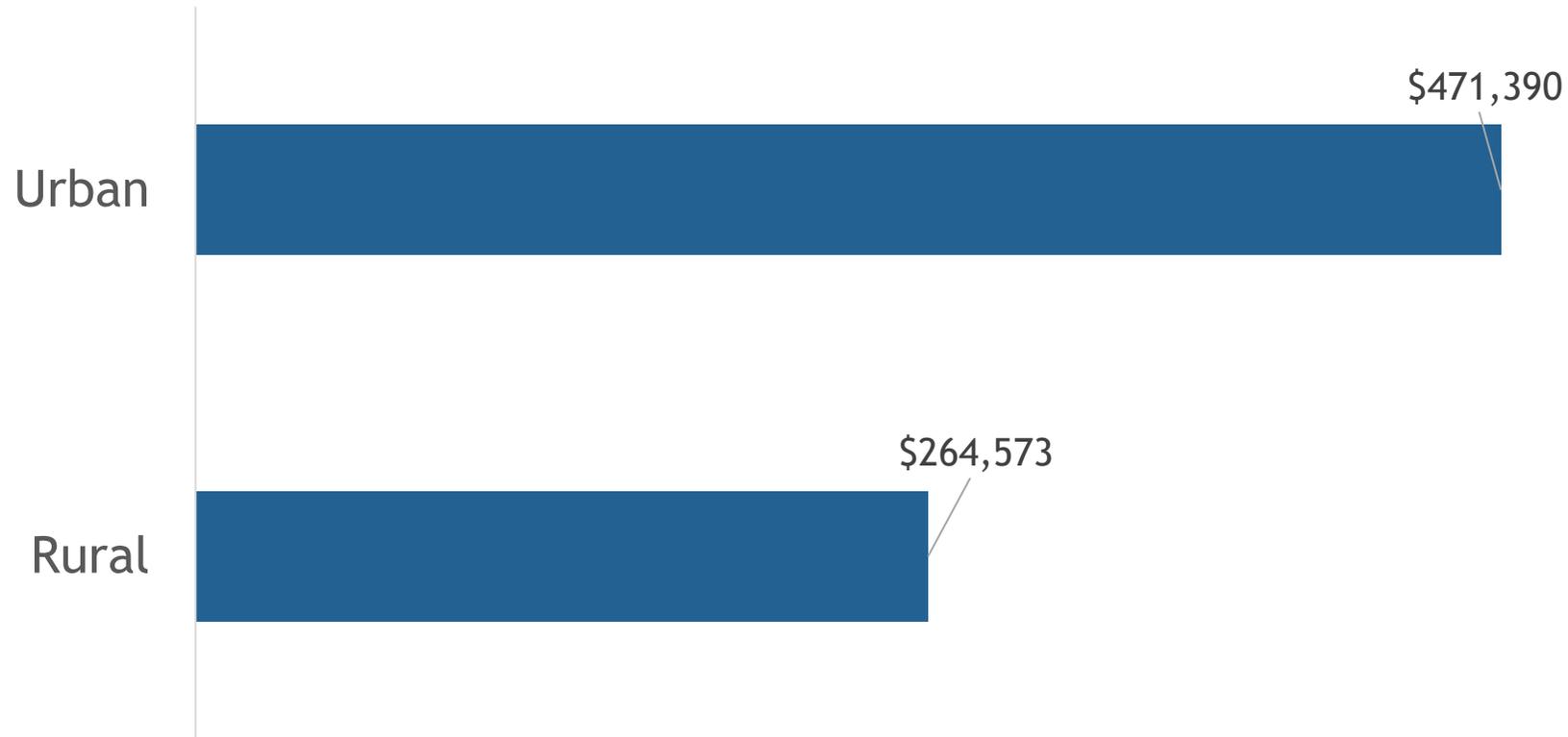
Source: 2016 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (data show all Medicare beneficiaries)

Rural/Urban Differences in Poverty Among Older Adults (65+)



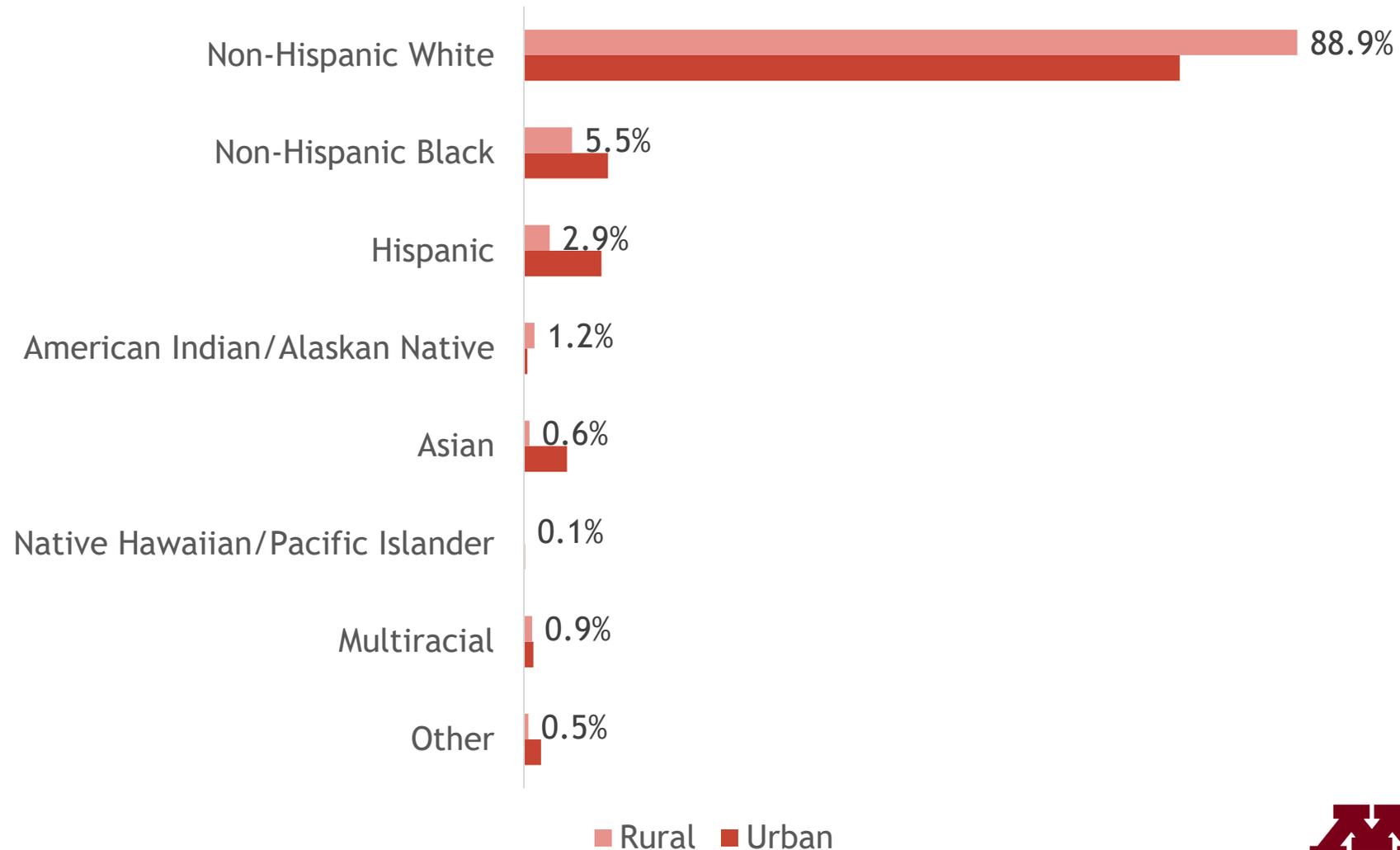
Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey; <https://rhrc.umn.edu/publication/rural-urban-differences-among-older-adults/>

Rural/Urban Differences in Assets and Wealth Among Older Adults (65+)



Source: 2015 National Health and Aging Trends Study <https://rhrc.umn.edu/publication/rural-urban-differences-among-older-adults/>

Race and Ethnicity of Older Adults



Structural Racism and Rural Health

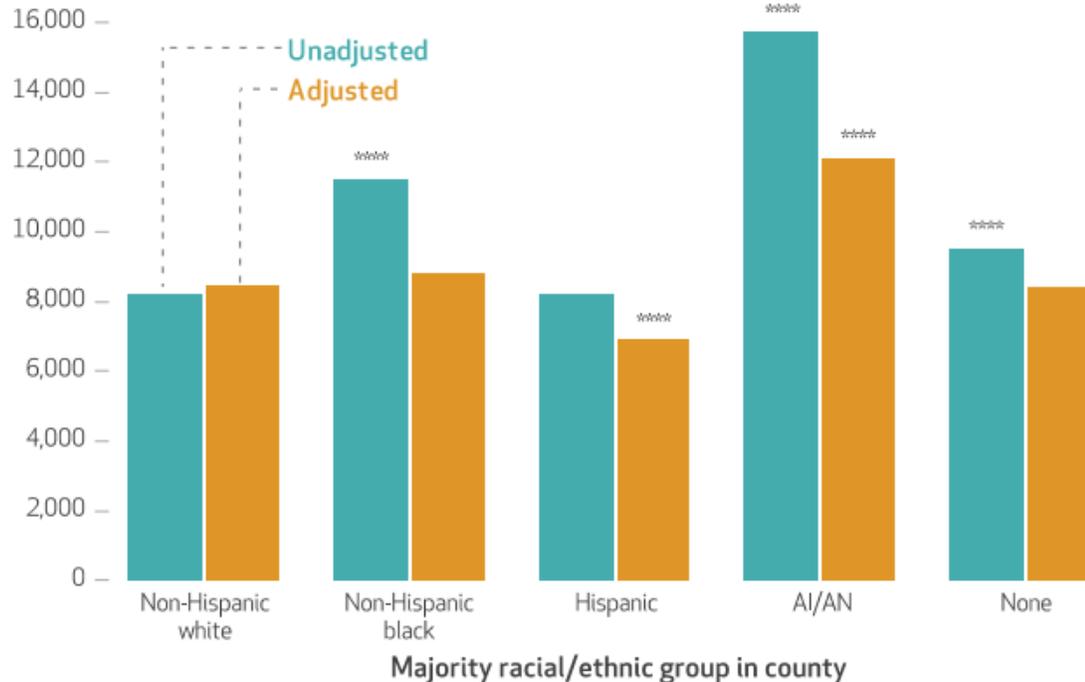
EXHIBIT 2

Sample sociodemographic characteristics of rural counties, by majority racial/ethnic group, 2017

Characteristic	All rural counties (N = 1,970)	Majority racial/ethnic group				
		Non-Hispanic white (n = 1,753)	Non-Hispanic black (n = 66)	Hispanic (n = 68)	AI/AN (n = 25)	None (n = 58)
Median household income (\$)	44,790	45,605	30,281****	43,166**	39,001****	41,080****
Unemployment rate (%)	5.6					
Population younger than age 18 (%)	22.3					
Female (%)	49.6					
Limited access to healthy food (%)	9.5					
Primary care physicians per capita ^a	50.6					

EXHIBIT 3

Predicted county-level years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 people, by majority racial/ethnic group in county, 2012-14

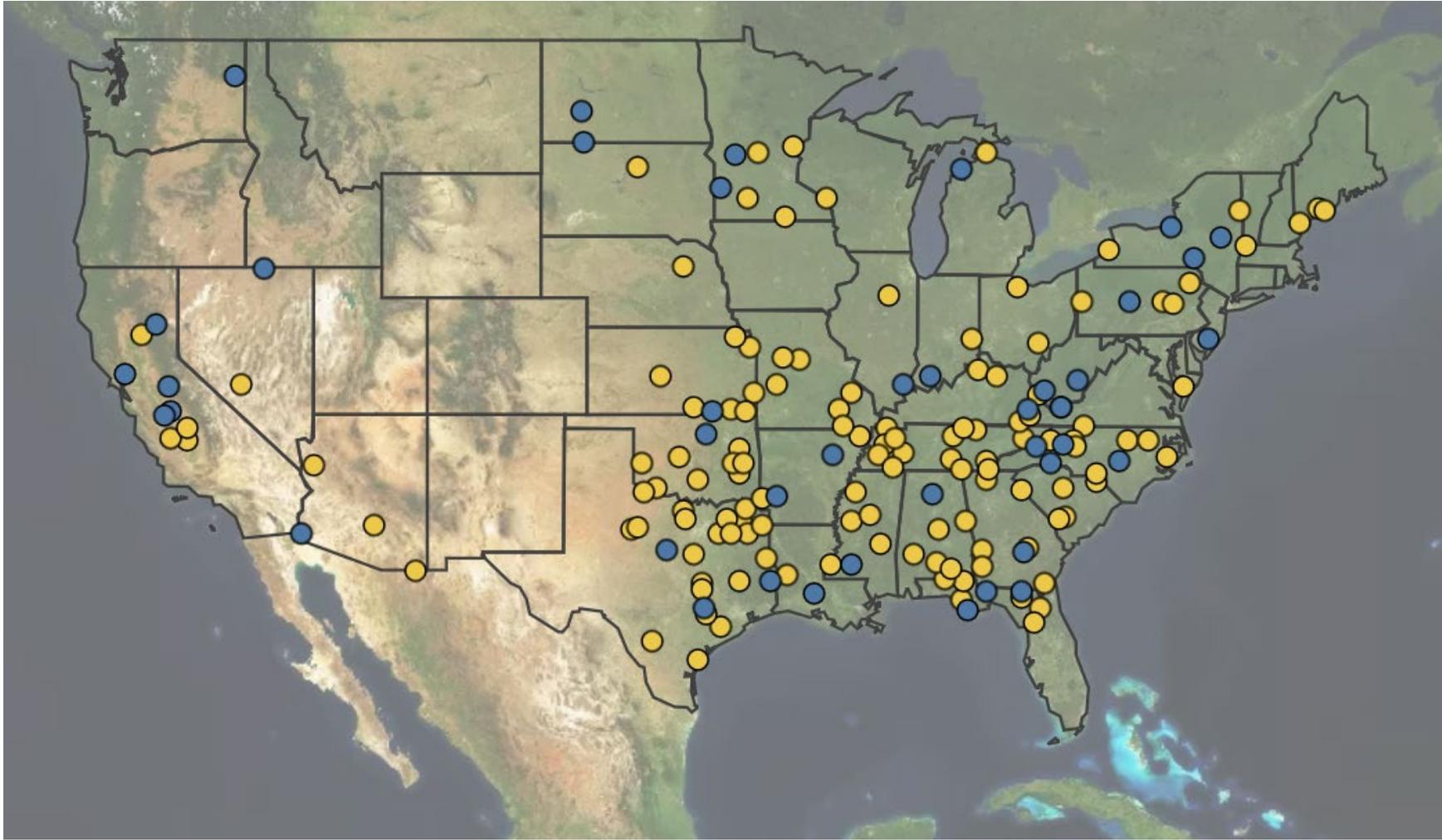


Source: Henning-Smith, Hernandez, Hardeman, Ramirez, Kozhimannil, 2019, Health Affairs

Infrastructure and Physical Environment

- Rural areas differ from urban in terms of:
 - Natural and built environments
 - Population density
 - Access to resources and amenities, such as:
 - Health care
 - Transportation
 - Housing
 - Broadband Internet and cellular connectivity
 - Water and air quality

Access to Health Care - Hospital Closures



Source: University of North Carolina Sheps Center <https://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/rural-health/rural-hospital-closures/>

Rural Transportation Challenges

POLICY BRIEF
November 2017



Rural Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities

Carrie Henning-Smith, PhD
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Ira Moscovice, PhD

Key Findings

- 113 key informants from all fifty states reported rural transportation challenges across six distinct, interrelated themes: infrastructure (mentioned by 63%), geography (46%), funding (27%), accessibility (27%), political support and public awareness (19%), and socio-demographics (11%).
- Most key informants highlighted problems across multiple themes, illustrating the complexity of meeting the transportation needs of rural residents.
- Improving rural access to transportation services is, in the opinion of nearly all key informants, an area of critical importance to rural populations.
- Policy interventions should aim to improve awareness of existing transportation services; address accessibility for all riders; share best practices between states, communities, and health care facilities to improve efficiency; and build partnerships that cross traditional organizational and sector boundary lines.

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Purpose

Transportation, as it relates to health and health care, is widely acknowledged to have unique features in rural communities, but there is limited research on specific challenges and potential policy interventions to alleviate them. This policy brief uses survey data from 113 key informants across all fifty states to describe challenges and opportunities related to rural transportation.

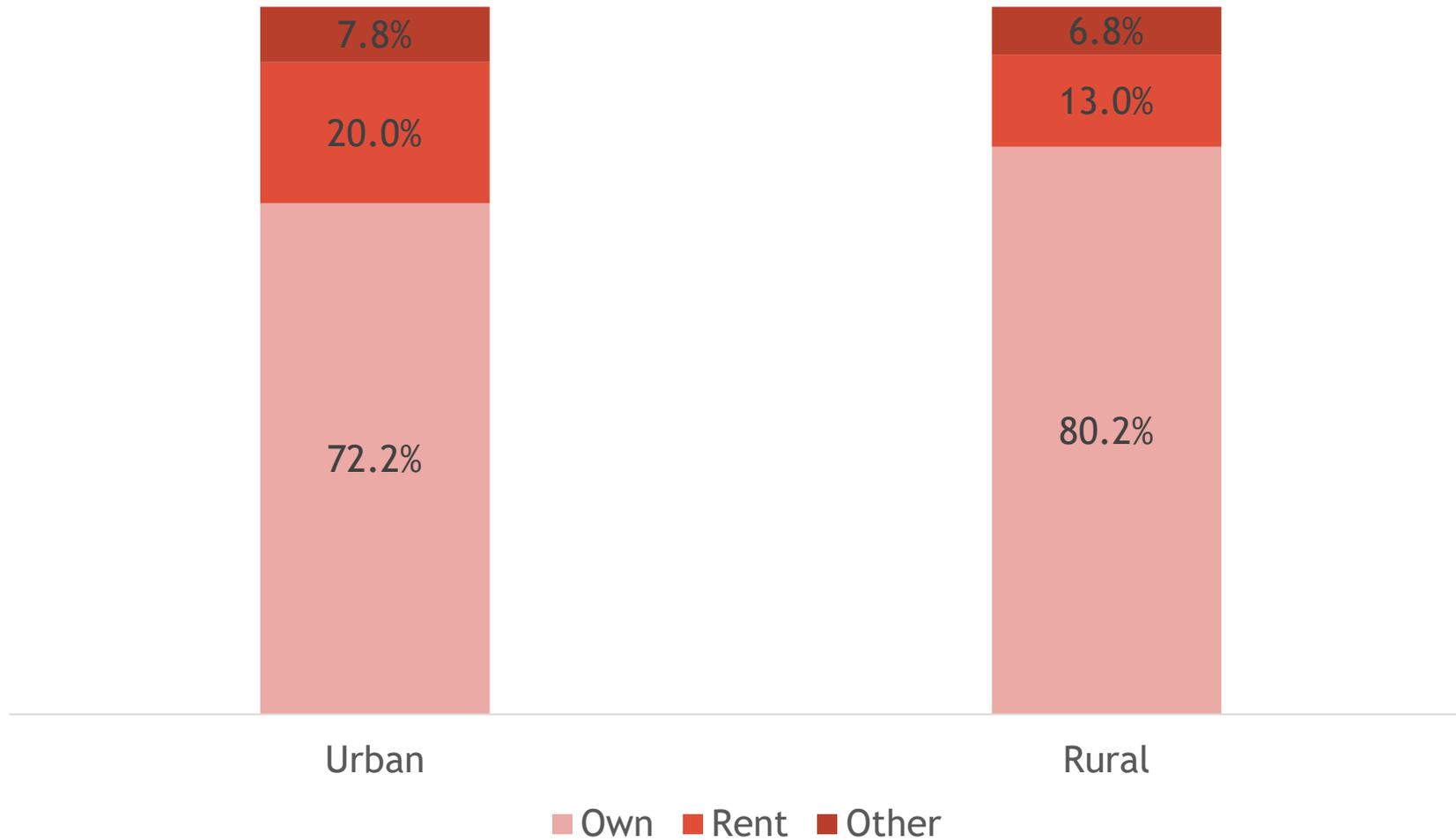
Background and Policy Context

Transportation has long been cited as a concern for rural residents, but is rarely the focus of health services research.¹ As a social determinant of health, access to high-quality, affordable transportation is fundamental to mental, physical, and emotional well-being. For individuals with disabilities, those with low incomes, older adults, and others who may not have reliable access to a vehicle or be able to safely drive themselves, public and private transportation is critical to access health services, obtain food and other necessities, and engage with their communities.² Medicaid is currently an important source of transportation for individuals who qualify, providing emergency and non-emergency medical transportation. However, exact benefits vary by state, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services only permit reimbursement for "loaded" miles in which the beneficiary is in the vehicle.³ This puts rural transportation providers at a distinct disadvantage, since they need to bear the burden of driving more unreimbursed miles to pick up a passenger. The Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 and 5311 programs are also important sources of transportation assistance in rural areas, providing federal matching dollars for public transportation for individuals with disabilities and rural areas, respectively.⁴ However, these also rely on some funding and coordination at the state level, leading to disparities in access to and quality of transportation programs by state, and they alone may not be sufficient to address all rural transportation challenges.

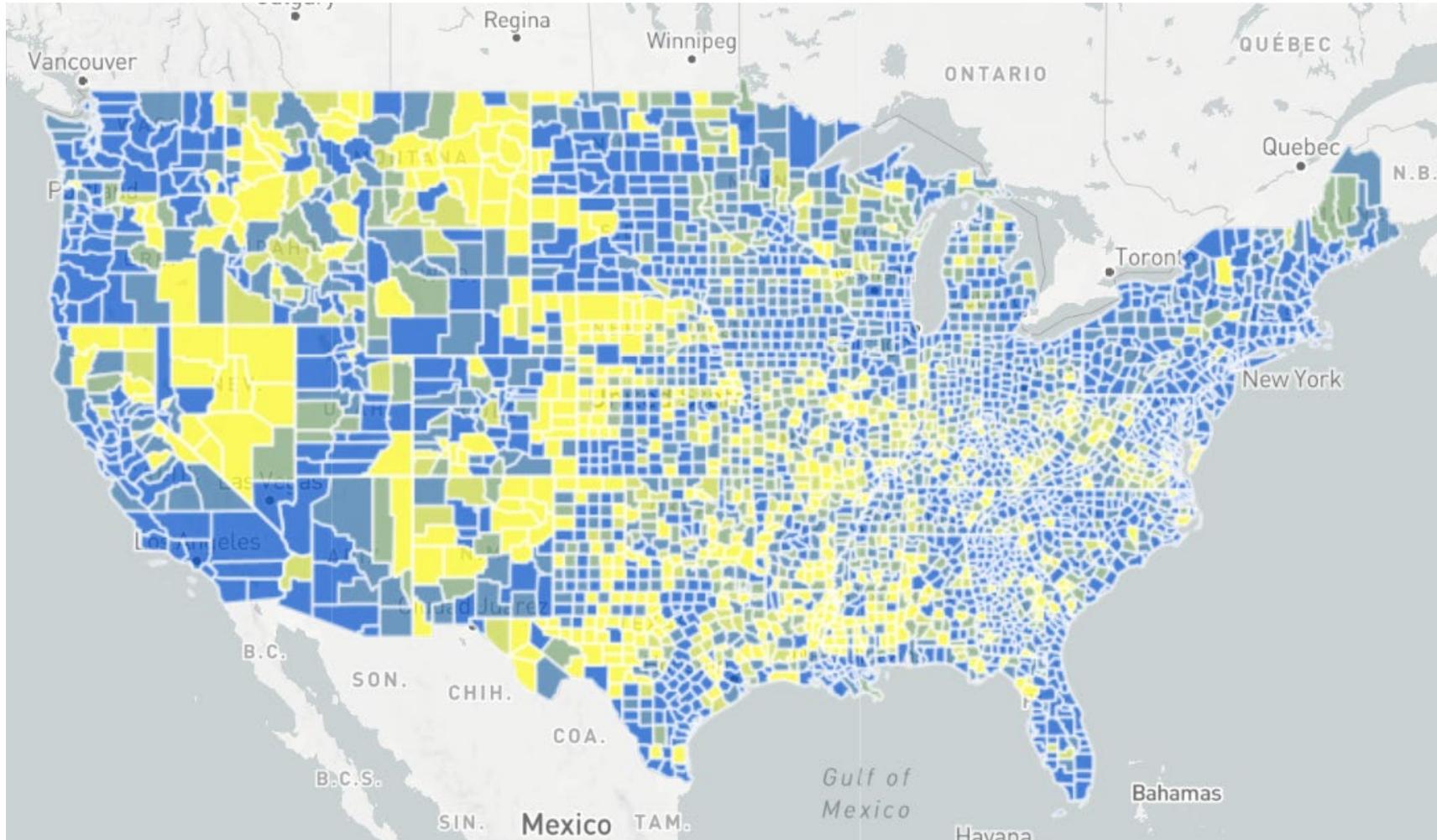
In both rural and urban settings, transportation clearly impacts the usage of health care services, because individuals without reliable transportation are more likely to delay and forgo necessary appointments, preventive care, and health maintenance activities.⁵ A study of more than 1,000 households in North Carolina found that those with a driver's license had 2.3 times more health visits for chronic care and 1.9 times more visits for regular checkup care than those who did not have a driver's license, and those who had family or friends who could

- Key rural-specific challenges:
 - Infrastructure (roads, bridges, availability of vehicles);
 - Geography;
 - Funding;
 - Accessibility;
 - Political support and public awareness;
 - Socio-demographics

Homeownership among Older Adults



Broadband Access



Source: Federal Communications Commission: https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/maps/connect2health/#ll=30.826781,-78.658447&z=7&t=broadband&bbm=fixed_access&dmf=none&zlt=county

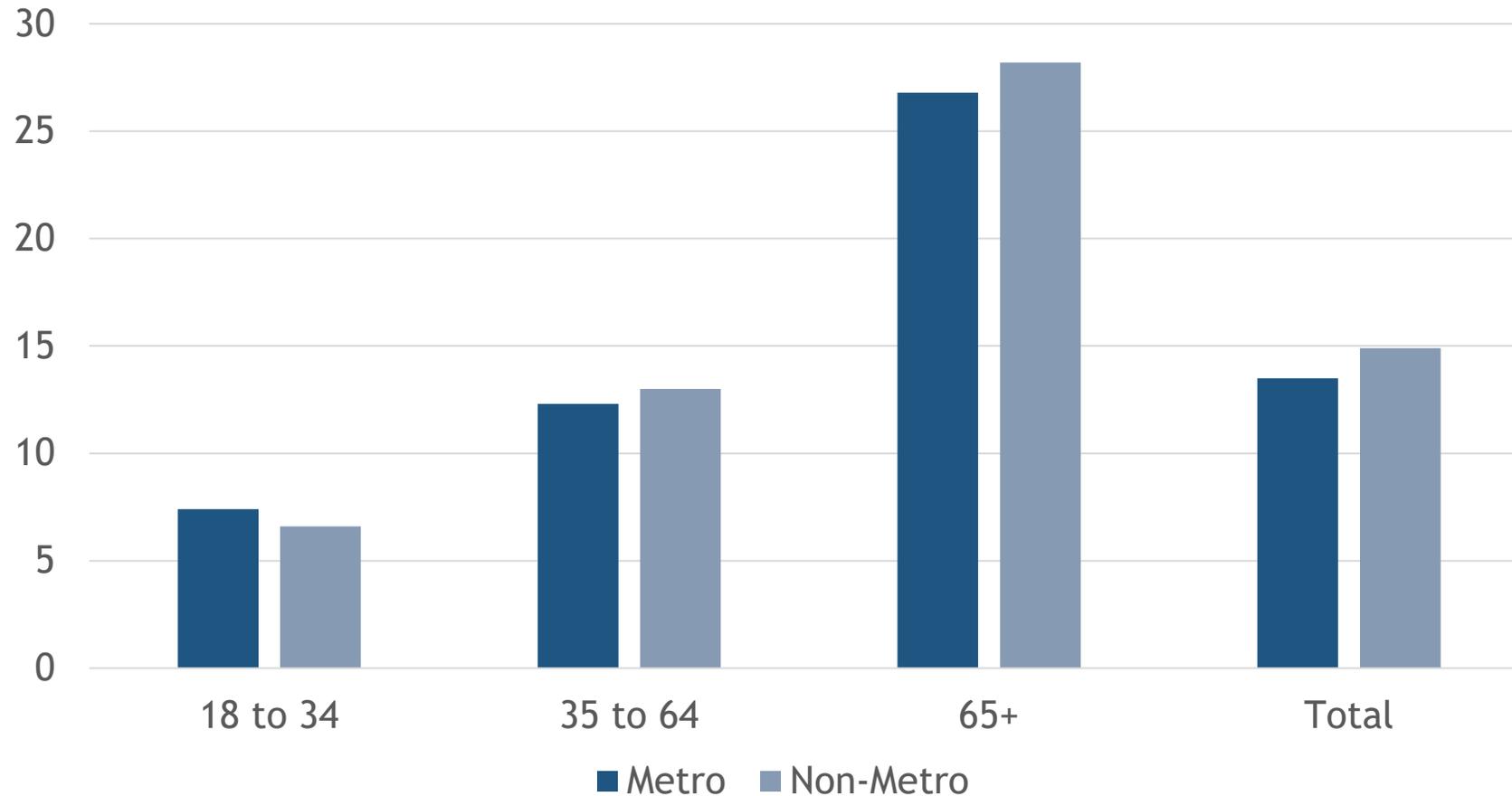
Social Connectedness

Compared to urban older adults, rural older adults:

- Are more likely to live alone
- Have larger social networks
- Are more likely to report feeling lonely



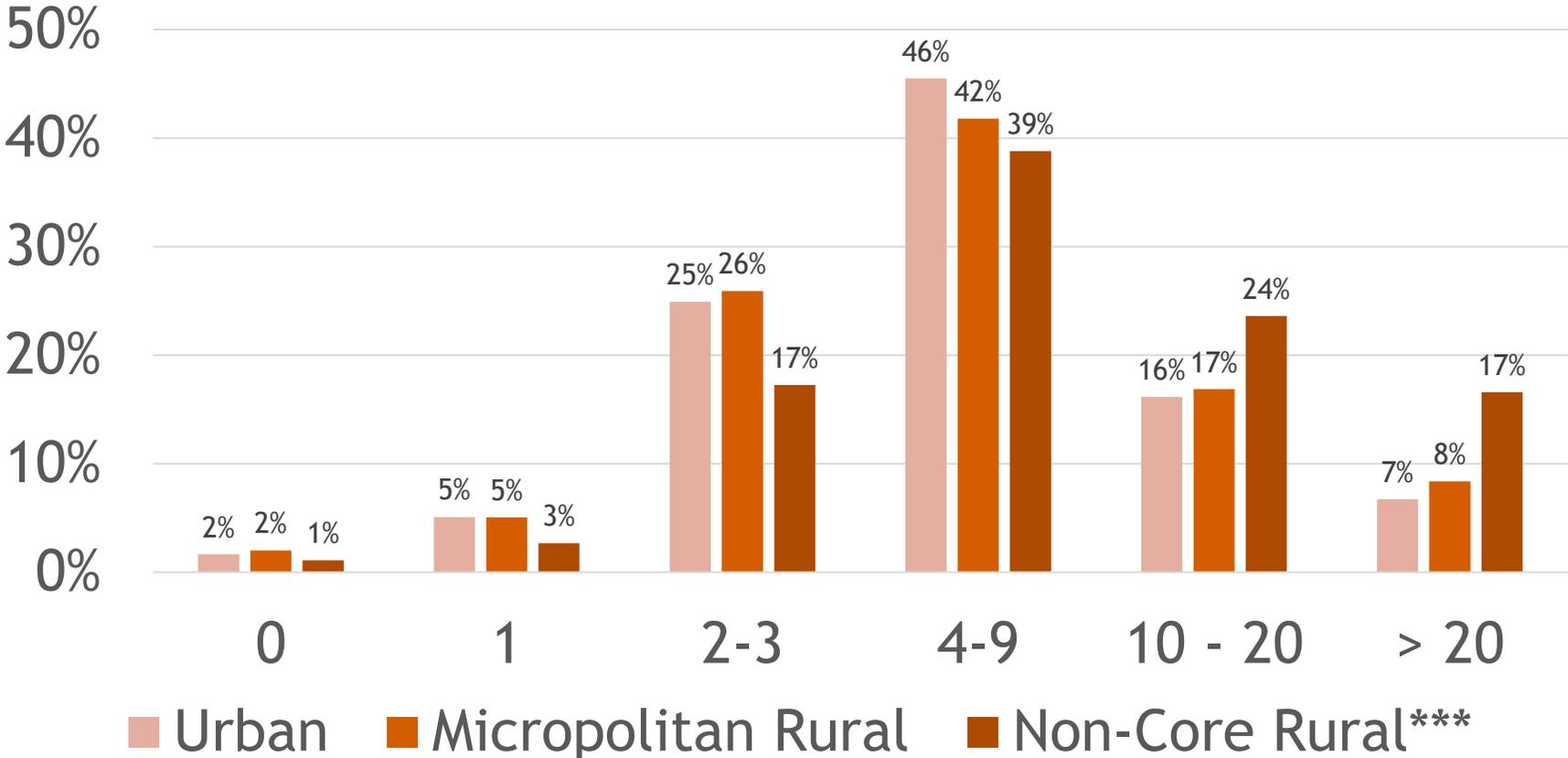
Rural-Urban Differences: Living Alone



Source: Henning-Smith et al. (2020). <https://rhrc.umn.edu/publication/rates-of-living-alone-by-rurality-and-age/>

Rural-Urban Differences: Relationships

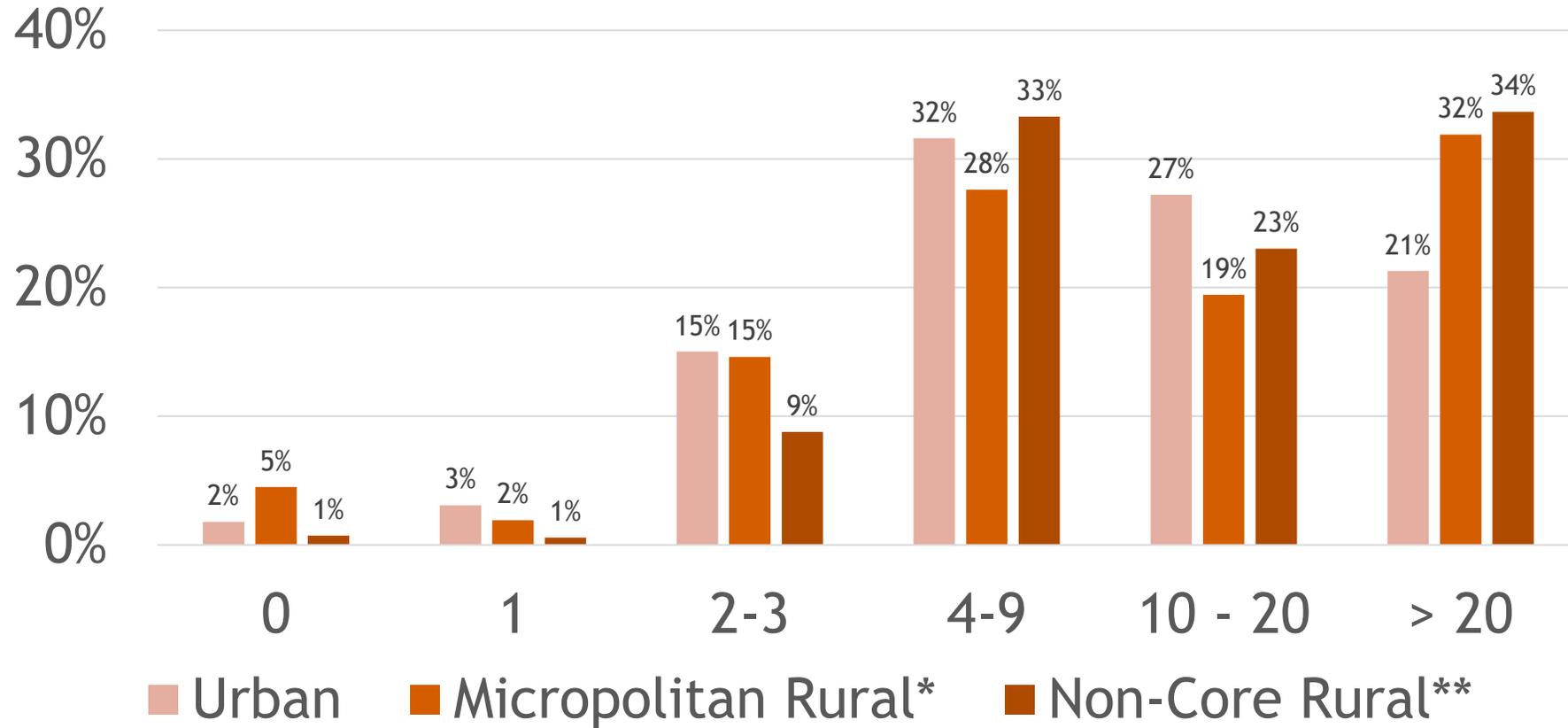
Number of Close Relatives



***Non-core different than urban at $p < 0.001$; Source: Henning-Smith et al. (2019)

Rural-Urban Differences: Relationships

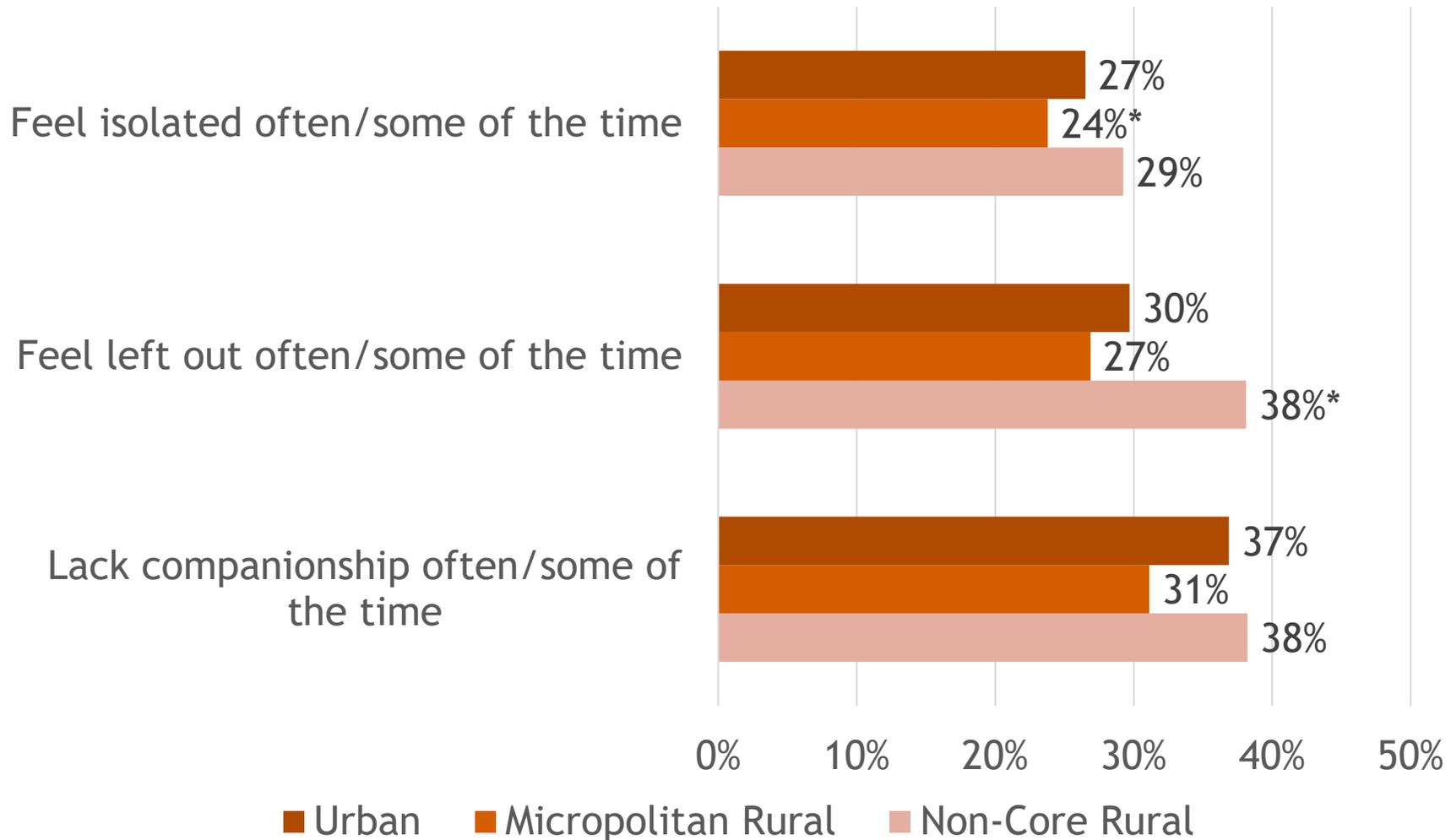
Number of Friends



*Micropolitan different than urban at $p < 0.05$;

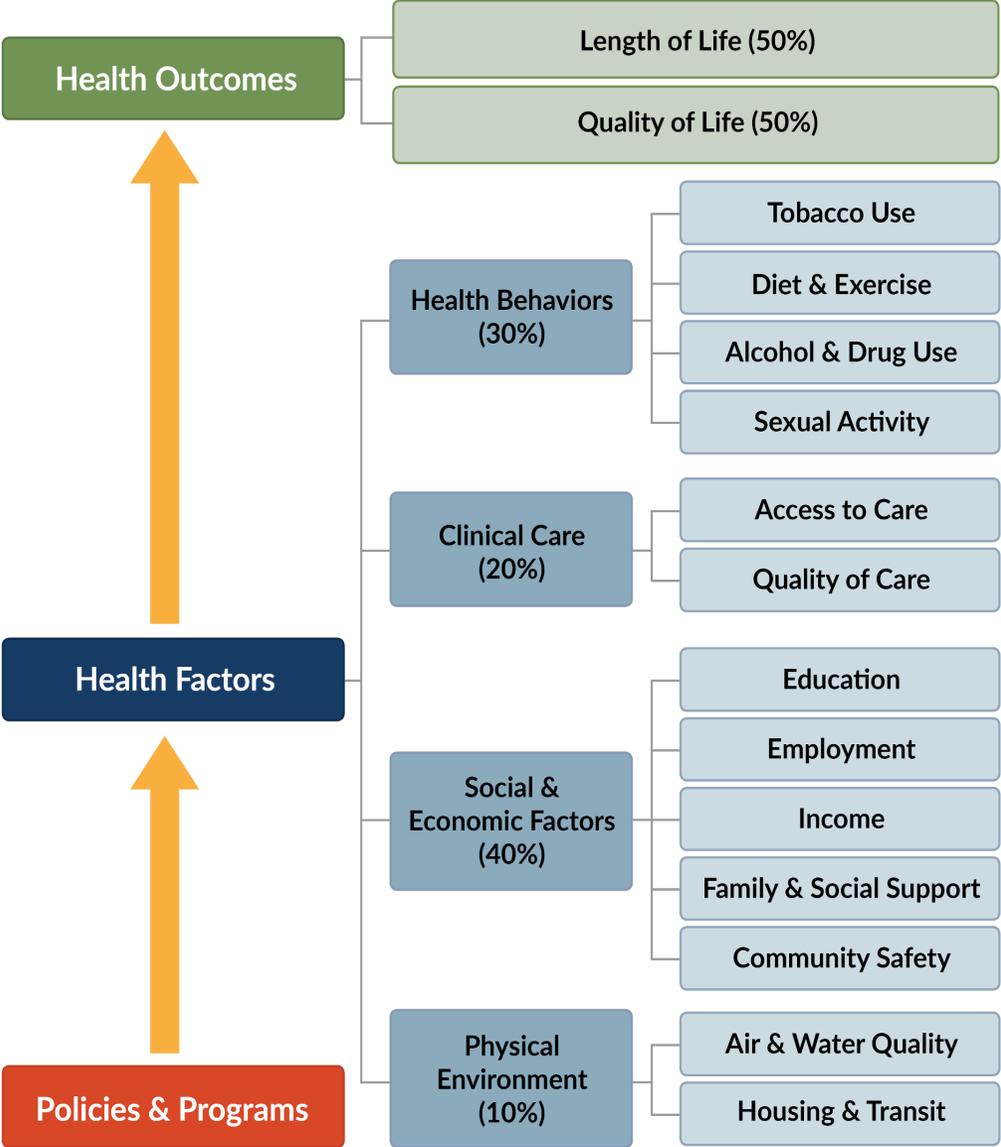
**Non-core different than urban at $p < 0.01$; Source: Henning-Smith et al. (2019)

Rural-Urban Differences: Loneliness



*Different than urban at $p < 0.05$; Source: Henning-Smith et al. (2019)

Why Address Social Determinants?



County Health Rankings model © 2014 UWPHI

Source: RWJF County Health Rankings
<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/resources/county-health-rankings-model>

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- 3: Program Clearinghouse
- 4: Implementation
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- 6: Sustainability
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Published: 3/6/2020

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Welcome to the Social Determinants of Health in Rural Communities Toolkit. This toolkit compiles evidence-based and promising models and resources to support organizations

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Thank you!

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