

# RURAL ACCESS TO HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES CHAPTER

RURAL PLANNING



RURAL ECONOMIES



RURAL TRANSPORT



RURAL CONNECTIVITY

RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

FAIR FUNDING

## WINNING THE RURAL VOTE

### A ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS



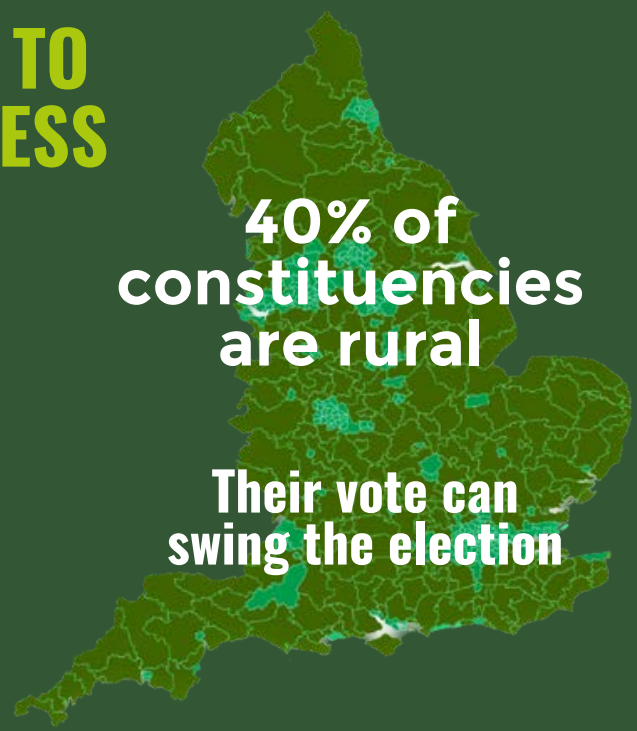
RURAL NET ZERO

RURAL HEALTH & CARE



40% of constituencies are rural

Their vote can swing the election





## Rural Access to Health and Care Services



RURAL  
SERVICES  
NETWORK

WINNING THE  
RURAL ✓ VOTE

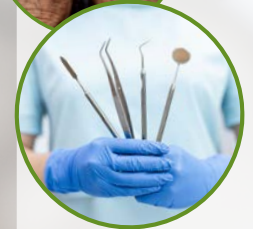
# 40% of Constituencies are Rural. Rural Health and Care Services Matter.



Rural residents face distinct healthcare challenges, including limited access to transport, longer distances to medical facilities, an aging demographic, housing inadequacies, digital connectivity gaps, and recruitment hurdles for healthcare workers.

These factors collectively impede the delivery of equitable health and care services, a fundamental NHS principle. While the EFRA report highlights the neglect of rural needs in mental health policy, rural councils grapple with delivering social care amidst escalating costs and demand. Despite these challenges, health and care remain top priorities for rural communities, a sentiment intensified post-Covid-19.

The healthcare system confronts a critical dilemma: balancing the need for specialised, centralised services with the necessity for geographic accessibility. Innovations in community-based healthcare and digital health solutions offer promising avenues, yet their success hinges on robust network connectivity. Addressing mental wellbeing, particularly in isolated communities, and ensuring consistent care support through diverse networks, are pivotal for maintaining the health and independence of rural populations.



# THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

2020

## ▶ New Hospitals Programme

The Government announced £3.7 billion to fund major rebuild or expansion projects at 40 NHS hospitals over the following decade. Despite progress, this programme has been subject to delay with some projects now due for completion later than 2030. Priority has also now been given to progressing seven projects that involve replacing existing buildings with RAAC.

2021

## ▶ Adult Social Care (People at the Heart of Care)

The 'People at the Heart of Care' White Paper, published in 2021, outlined a ten-year vision for adult social care in the UK with a three-year funding plan. It focused on enhancing housing, technology, workforce training, support for unpaid carers, and service innovation, aiming to give individuals more choice in care services and promote independence in local communities. However, there were concerns about its impact on rural areas and funding distribution. The government proposed reforms including a lifetime care cost cap and means test changes.

2022

## ▶ Elective Recovery Implementation Plan

Produced by the Elective Recovery Taskforce, seeks to tackle the backlog for elective care which built up during the Covid pandemic. Actions include using capacity within the independent healthcare sector and giving patients the option to travel further afield for treatment, where this will reduce the waiting time.

## ▶ Integrated Care Strategies

Taking forward reforms set out in the Health and Care Act 2022, Integrated Care Partnerships across the country must prepare Integrated Care Strategies. Priorities for these are to reduce disparities in health and social care, to improve service quality and performance, to prevent mental and physical ill-health, and to maximise independence or prevent care needs. The strategies should help join-up health, care, and wider services in the area, as well as enabling approaches which address the wider determinants of poor health.

## ▶ Mental Health Policies

Current policies are those set out in the Government's NHS Long Term Plan (2019), which pledged to give mental health services a growing share of the NHS budget. That Plan is also driving reform to create integrated community mental health services. Most mental health services are locally commissioned and responsibility for more specialist services is now being delegated to the local level.

2023

## ▶ NHS Long Term Workforce Plan

The Government published its long-awaited Workforce Plan, describing itself as "a once-in-a-generation opportunity to put [NHS] staffing on a sustainable footing and improve patient care". This Plan seeks to train more staff, to retain more staff and to improve workforce productivity. It includes ambitious targets, such as expanding the number of professional training places for GPs by 50%, for nurses by 92% and for dentists by 42% all by 2031/32. It does not cover Social Care for which there is no similar plan.

## ▶ Stalling of Adult Social Care Reforms

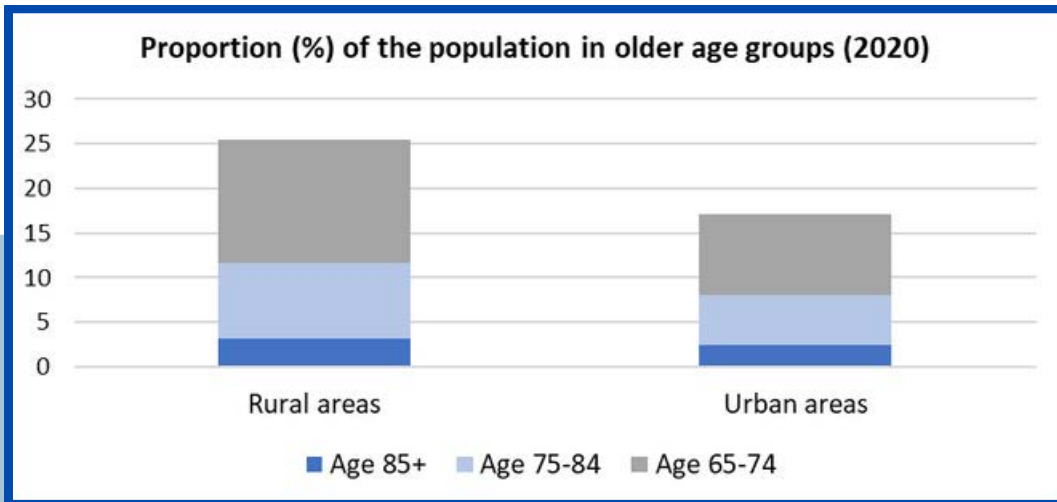
Initially, the government proposed a series of proposed reforms, including the introduction of a cap on lifetime care costs, changes to the means test and a White Paper on wider reforms. However, in recent months it appears that reform has entirely stalled. In its November 2022 Autumn Statement, the government announced that the cap and means test reforms would be postponed until October 2025. With a general election to be held no later than January 2025, there is therefore a risk that these reforms are never implemented.

The Kings Fund reports "Now, following publication of its 'next steps' document on 4 April 2023, many of the remaining measures from the White Paper have been cut back or even abandoned. Most notably, a key promise of at least £500 million to be spent on workforce training, qualifications and wellbeing has been cut to £250 million, and a promised £300 million to transform housing options has been replaced by £102 million for smaller in-home adaptations. Spending on innovation and improvement has also been cut back, though investment in digital has emerged largely untouched and there are very small pots for carer support, international recruitment, and volunteers.

2024

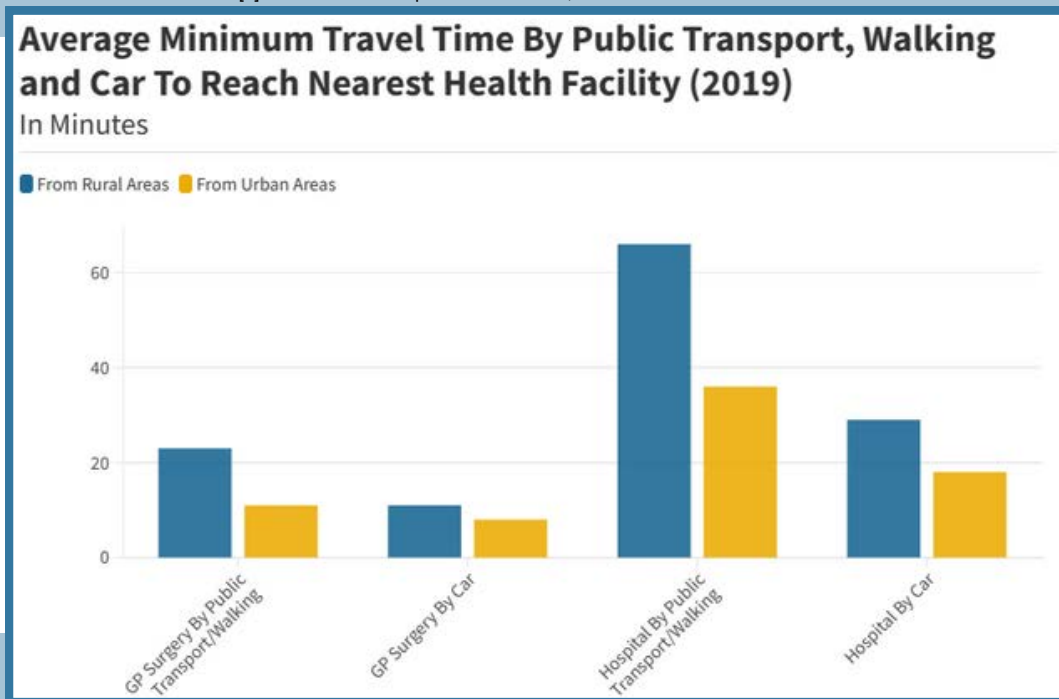


# THE RURAL REALITY



Older people form a significantly larger proportion of the population in rural areas than in urban areas. A quarter of residents in rural areas are aged 65 or over, a point which matters since age is the main determinant of demand for health and care services.[1] Frailty and complex comorbidity are more common among this age group. Furthermore, the proportion of older people is increasing fastest in rural areas. This trend is very marked for those aged 85 or over whose care needs tend to be most complex (and expensive to meet).

[1] 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics.



Getting to health facilities can be more time-consuming and complex for rural residents. This is especially so for those who need to use public transport, as statistics in the table above show.[1] Moreover, these figures understate the issues faced by many rural residents, where public transport exists but is infrequent.

[1] Travel time statistics 2019, Department for Transport.

There are other important health services to access, of course, such as community pharmacies. In rural areas where they are not present the role of dispensing GP surgeries can plug a crucial gap.



# RURAL RESEARCH



2,000

Residents for every NHS dentist in predominantly rural areas



1,700

Residents for every NHS dentist in predominantly urban areas

## Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

Predominantly urban local authorities receive some 14% more grant funding per head to pay for social care services.

£142.57

Rural

£162.43

Urban

## Public Health Grant 2024/25

Predominantly urban local authorities receive some 57.5% more grant funding per head to pay for their public health responsibilities.

£46.42

Rural

£73.09

Urban

## Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

Urban Councils Receive some 36% more in Government funded spending power per head compared to rural councils.

£394.80

Rural

£536.51

Urban

Urban authorities are budgeting to spend almost double that of rural on so called discretionary services – which include things like bus service support, support to the voluntary and community sectors and economic development generally. In 2022/23 planned expenditure on public transport per resident was around 3.5 times more in urban areas than rural.



# SPECIFIC POLICY ASKS IN THE ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS: RURAL ACCESS TO HEALTH & CARE SERVICES

Calls for the first 18 months of the next General Election

## PROTECT

Protect rural communities by accepting the recommendations of the May 2023 EFRA Committee report into rural mental health. Immediately action the recommendation to establish a "new joint rural health policy and delivery team to lead and improve on current "rural proofing" of health policy; and work with NHS England to set targets to measure and improve outcomes for rural mental health services and support rural health providers".

## DELIVER

Deliver a rural work force strategy to aid training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.



## ENSURE

Ensure that strategies account for rural challenges, particularly in addressing health disparities caused by housing quality, job opportunities, and training. Factor in the extra costs of providing services in rural areas when developing funding formulas.



Calls for the first 3 years of the next General Election

## CREATE

Create a culture which ensures the Third Sector is included as a partner in the integrated planning system and resourced accordingly, where it is cost effective to do so and in the community's interests. The contribution of community and voluntary organisations must not be underestimated, no least with respect to prevention and wellbeing.

## ADDRESS

Address the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places.



## DEVELOP

Develop integrated services that provide holistic person-centered care.



## SUPPORT FOR THE ABOVE CALLS

### ENHANCING HOSPITAL ACCESS

Prioritise transport and accessibility for rural patients, visitors, and staff in hospital planning. Expand transport schemes and align funding to support the elderly rural population.

### STRENGTHENING LOCAL CARE

Develop multi-disciplinary health hubs in rural towns to offer a range of services locally, reducing travel to hospitals. Maintain and support local pharmaceutical services.

### BOOSTING PUBLIC AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Increase focus and resources for public and mental health services in rural areas, addressing funding disparities and promoting best practices.

### IMPROVING SOCIAL CARE

Implement fair funding to address the higher costs of delivering social care in rural areas and enhance engagement with local support services.

### ADDRESSING WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Include a rural focus in the NHS Workforce Plan, offer incentives to attract healthcare professionals to rural areas, and incorporate rural placements in medical training.

### INCORPORATING RURAL NEEDS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ensure the UK Health Security Agency's strategic plan comprehensively addresses the specific needs and context of rural healthcare.






## ACCESS TO RURAL HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES


The policy solutions outlined focus on enhancing health and social care in rural areas, addressing both existing challenges and leveraging opportunities for improvement. The policy solutions advocate for a more tailored approach to healthcare in rural areas, emphasising the importance of understanding and addressing the specific challenges and needs of these communities. The integration of digital solutions, the need for fair funding, and the implementation of strategic recommendations from various reports are seen as pivotal steps towards achieving equitable and effective health and care services in rural settings.

## RURAL PROOFING HEALTH AND CARE PLANS



Ensuring that both national and local health and care plans are "rural-proofed" is emphasised as a core requirement. This means that policies and services should be specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of rural communities, ensuring equitable healthcare access and addressing specific rural challenges.


## UTILISATION OF DIGITAL HEALTH SERVICES




The potential of digital health and care services to improve rural provision is acknowledged. It suggests learning from the virtual consultation experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it also notes the need to address the gaps in rural connectivity to fully utilise these digital solutions.

Body

## REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 
- The Rural Services Network, in collaboration with the County Council Network, published a report emphasising the need for fair funding in rural health and care.
  - Rural England CIC and the NCRHC developed a "Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit," aiming to guide the implementation of rural-centric health policies and practices.
  - The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Health and Care, along with the National Centre for Rural Health and Care, released a report with key recommendations for improving rural health and care, based on a detailed investigation.

## UK HEALTH SECURITY AGENCY STRATEGY (2023-2026)



The newly published strategy by the UK Health Security Agency highlights the importance of addressing the unique needs of rural communities. It stresses the need for the agency to work in conjunction with central government to tackle structural weaknesses and focus on the social determinants of poor health specific to rural areas. The Rural Services Network has published a review and commentary on this strategy, indicating a critical evaluation and feedback mechanism to ensure the strategy's effectiveness in rural contexts.



# FURTHER READING & USEFUL LINKS



**Rural Mental Health published by Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.**

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmenvfru/248/report.html>

**Unleashing Rural Opportunity produced by DEFRA.**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/647f3c1a103ca60013039a60/Unleashing\\_rural\\_opportunity.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/647f3c1a103ca60013039a60/Unleashing_rural_opportunity.pdf)

**Response to the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan produced by the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.**

[https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/uploads-New/NCRHC\\_response\\_to\\_NHS\\_Workforce\\_.pdf](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/uploads-New/NCRHC_response_to_NHS_Workforce_.pdf)

**Rural Coalition response to the Department of Health and Social Care Major Conditions Strategy.**

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/documents/rural-coalition-response.pdf>

**Review of UK Health Security Agency Strategic Plan 2023-26 produced by Rural Services Network and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.**

[https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/RHCA/Publications/RSN\\_NCRHC\\_Review\\_of\\_UK\\_HSA\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2023\\_2026.pdf](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/RHCA/Publications/RSN_NCRHC_Review_of_UK_HSA_strategic_plan_2023_2026.pdf)

**Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit produced by Rural England CIC and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.**

<https://ruralengland.org/rural-proofing-for-health-toolkit/>

**The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Health and Care Inquiry Report produced by the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.**

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/RuralHealthandCareAPPGInquiryOve.pdf>

**The State of Care in County and Rural Areas produced by the Rural Services Network and County Council Network.**

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/the-state-of-care-in-counties-full-report.pdf>

**Reform of Adult Social Care: Vanishing over the horizon produced by the Kings Fund.**

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/blogs/reform-social-care-vanishing-over-horizon>





The Rural Services Network produces rural lens reviews on government papers covering a wide range of topics, see: [www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens) for a comprehensive list of reviews. The Rural Lens reviews below are particularly relevant to **Rural Access to Health and Care Services**:

## **Health White Paper Integration and Innovation**

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rsn-completes-rural-lens-review-on-health-white-paper>

## **People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White Paper**

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-review-of-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper>

# Find out more about the Winning the Rural Vote Campaign, click the logos for more details.



Think before you print. Document published 12.04.2024 and subject to regular updates, check our website for the latest version.



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