

Amount of care similar for rural, urban medicare users

7 November 2013



Photo: U.S. Department of Agriculture

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(HealthDay)—Although there may be a limited supply of physicians in some rural areas, little difference is found in the amount of health care received by Medicare beneficiaries for rural versus urban areas within the same region, according to research published in the November issue of *Health Affairs*.

Jeffrey Stensland, of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission in Washington, D.C., and colleagues analyzed 2008 claims data for all Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries to assess patterns of use by rural/urban status and region.

The researchers found no significant differences in rural versus urban Medicare beneficiaries for amount of [health care](#) services received or satisfaction regarding access to care. Although the amount of care used differed across regions, little difference was observed within each region.

"To the extent that Medicare payment policies are designed to ensure access, they should be assessed on the basis of achieving similar service use rather than similar local physician supply," the authors write. "They should also be targeted to isolated rural providers needed to preserve access to care."

APA citation: Amount of care similar for rural, urban medicare users (2013, November 7) retrieved 9 September 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-amount-similar-rural-urban-medicare.html>

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