

Mental Health Care Deserts Brief

The Problem

- Mental illness is a widespread problem in our nation, with estimates that 1 in 5 Americans live with some kind of mental health diagnosis (1)
- A combination of improved diagnosis and treatment have greatly expanded our view of the prevalence of mental illness in this nation (2)
- Beyond affecting personal quality of life, mental illness is a contributor to many other problems in the country such as:
 - School performance issues (3)
 - Crime and prison recidivism (4)
 - Lifetime stress (5)
 - Suicide (6)
- While mental health issues in the workplace have not been as extensively studied as in schools, it stands to reason that worker productivity and performance would also be affected by the same mechanisms, further augmenting mental illness' toll on our national well-being.
- Lifetime stress in particular has been shown to affect both maternal mortality and neonatal mortality, further underscoring the interrelationship between mental and physical health. (7)

The Need

- Despite this prevalence of mental health illness, it remains woefully undertreated in our society. Multiple factors contribute to these barriers in access. Barriers such as:
 - A shortage of mental health professionals. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that by 2025 the nation will see an approximate shortfall of 15,000 psychiatrists and 57,000 psychologists (8)
 - There's resistance from third party payers to provide coverage. Medicare payments for 45 minutes of psychotherapy, for example, dropped from an average of \$102 in 2001 to \$86 in 2015, a 35% decrease (9)
 - There are long waiting lists for treatment at community mental health centers, with 94 million Americans having to wait a week or longer for mental health services (10)
- There are significant disparities in access that affect historically disadvantaged communities. These historically disadvantaged communities also suffer from a recognizable unmet need for mental health care (11)



- And perhaps more concerningly, there are regions in the United States without any meaningful mental health providers at all, creating literal mental health care deserts, with an analysis in 2020 showing that rural areas of the U.S. have an average of 3.4 psychiatrists per 100,000 people compared to metropolitan areas with 17.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 people (12)
- The presence of mental health care deserts exacerbates these pre-existing barriers, making it of greater importance that these regions be identified so that we can ascertain which communities are at heightened risk from the lack of mental health care treatment and need more mental health care providers.

Mental Health Care Deserts

- A health care desert, or “professional shortage area”, is a region of the country where the number of healthcare professionals and facilities are lower than what is recommended by health authorities (13)
- Perhaps the most studied healthcare professional shortage areas are primary care shortage areas (14)
- Multiple agencies, such as Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), have attempted to tackle this issue through a variety of programs, usually in the form of loan repayment and/or forgiveness programs that attempt to attract more mental health professionals to shortage areas (15)
- Efforts to identify mental health professional shortage areas follows similar methodology (16)
- An analysis from 2009 found that at that time 77% of U.S. counties had a severe lack of prescribing mental health providers (17)
- Data from HRSA’s tracking of mental health professional shortage areas show that some states, such as Wyoming and Utah, for example, show a major proportion of their population living in mental health care deserts (18)
- There are measurable deleterious outcomes of living in a mental health care desert beyond the lack of mental health treatment, such as increases in the suicide rate.
- The financial costs of these harmful outcomes are also substantial with suicides and suicide attempts costing our nation almost **\$70 billion** per year in lifetime medical and work loss costs alone (19)
- Overall, it is estimated that each year serious mental illness costs **\$193 billion** in lost earnings (20)

What HSR.health Offers

- HSR.health is an innovation-first healthcare technology firm and the leading provider of health-focused geospatial data analytics.
- Our AI-enabled, geospatial platform curates data globally and provides actionable health risk data analytics to healthcare industry professionals, NGO's, and government entities.
- Our Mental Health Care Desert analysis identifies multiple locations in the United States where mental health care resources are severely deficient and may constitute a significant barrier to care for millions of Americans.
- This analysis, part of our wider Care Desert series, is a first and important step in increasing the awareness of our policy makers to this often, under publicized problem.
- HSR.health hopes to lead the way in revealing how our geography can contribute to both health problems and likewise, health solutions.

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