

Navigating COPD in Rural America

Living in a rural area can affect your COPD.
Here's what you need to know.

1 in 5 Americans live in a rural area.

Rural Americans face more health challenges than people living in cities and difficulties getting healthcare because of:



Clinician shortages



Hospital closings



Lack of public transportation



Long distances to get to hospitals, specialists and pharmacies

These factors make it harder to live with COPD

What Is COPD?

COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, is a progressive lung condition that causes inflammation of the airways, making it hard to breathe.

COPD is the 5th leading cause of death in the U.S.

COPD in Rural Areas



1 in 12 of people in rural areas have COPD compared to **1 in 20** in urban areas.



Compared to people who live in cities, people in rural areas are:

- 2x as likely to have COPD
- More likely to go to the hospital for COPD
- More likely to die from COPD

COPD Is Worse for People in Rural Areas Because They:

Have more medical problems that can make COPD worse

Are more likely to work in industries that expose them to pollutants

Are more likely to smoke

Have fewer stop-smoking programs



Live with more indoor pollution from burning wood or coal for heating or cooking

Are more likely to not have health insurance

Have less money to afford medications to treat COPD

Have less access to healthcare, including specialists who treat COPD

May have more trouble getting diagnosed and treated for COPD

How to Manage COPD in Rural America



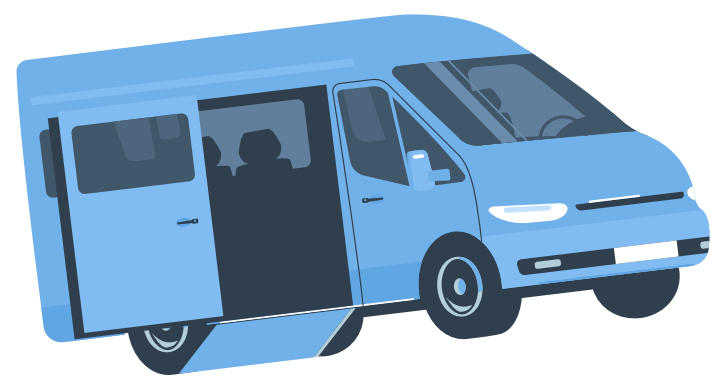
Track disease progression and symptoms to know if they're getting worse

- Use that information as an early warning and get to care



Use telehealth for:

- Remote monitoring to track symptoms, trends and triggers
- Digital pulmonary rehab to learn strategies
- Routine and time-sensitive care



Line up transportation in advance

- Insurance may cover transportation or local nonprofits may help
- Medicaid is required to pay for non-emergency medical transportation



Make a COPD Action Plan with:

- Your medicines
- How to know it's time to seek care
- How to reach your clinician
- Transportation options



Make lifestyle choices that keep COPD from getting worse

- Quit smoking
- Exercise for strength and stamina
- Eat nutritious foods
- Avoid irritants like dust and pollen
- Get good sleep
- Get vaccinated to prevent infections that make COPD worse



Advocate for yourself

- You may have to look harder or travel farther for a lung specialist.
- Most health insurance (including the VA and Medicaid) have to offer specialists within a certain travel time or distance. If they don't, you can get an exception to see someone out of the insurance network (but you have to request it).
- Find free or lower-cost care from rural and federally qualified health centers.

Remember

You ALWAYS have the right to emergency care.

