

A Practice Model of Health Care Access for People with Disabilities in the Rural United States.

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Introduction. Many people do not have access to affordable, quality health care. People who live in rural areas may be particularly compromised, as they often have fewer financial resources, business opportunities, health and social services, and public transportation options than those who live in urban and suburban areas. People with disabilities in rural areas are in poorer health and have fewer health-related resources available to them than their urban counterparts.

Objectives. To report on issues of rural health care access for people with disabilities in the United States. To identify participation barriers and enablers to health care access for people with disabilities. To propose a practice model that suggests ways to monitor and improve health care access for people with disabilities living in rural communities.

Description/Report. A literature review of health and education related databases including PubMed, Ovid, and Medline was conducted. Published studies were reviewed that discussed health care services, specifically access to those services, for people with disabilities living in rural areas. Key words used for this search included: disability, rural, health care, access, and environment.

Results/Discussion. More than 100 articles on health care and persons with disabilities were reviewed. Analyses indicated that people with disabilities in rural areas are in poorer health and have fewer services available to them than those who live in urban areas. Personal factors that affected participation in health care included type and severity of disability, psychological and physiological factors, and spirituality. Environmental factors included transportation, technology, culture, and the built environment, including facilities and equipment. The proposed model contains personal and environmental factors that influence health care access for people with disabilities.

Conclusion. People with disabilities who live in rural areas face a variety of personal and environmental factors that affect their health care participation. More resources must be allocated to rural areas in order to improve quality health care access by increasing affordable, reliable, and available transportation, technology, equipment, and services.

Contribution. As occupational therapists who serve the disability population, recognizing the barriers to quality health care, our services included, and advocating on behalf of our clients is very important.