2. Access to Care
Ranked AL's Second Health Indicator

Alabamians identified access to care as the second highest ranked health indicator in the community health system. Healthy People 2030 describes access to care as "the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best possible health outcomes."[1] Addressing access to healthcare services improves prevention of disease and reduces disability due to disease by allowing early detection and treatment of health conditions.

Quality access to care solutions can increase a community's quality of life, reduce preventable deaths, and increase the population's life expectancy. A well-developed care system can give an individual access to insurance cost coverage, geographic availability, and a personal relationship with the provider.[2] This allows the community to gain entry into the healthcare system, access a healthcare location where needed services are provided, and find a healthcare provider with whom the individual can communicate and trust long-term.

Vulnerable Populations

Anyone can be categorized as having limited access to care; however, having two or more limited access factors can decrease your overall health. Rural and underinsured individuals could be at a higher risk for not having proper access to care. Additionally, individuals who have unstable income, such as small business owners and individuals in the service industry, could be at risk of losing health insurance coverage.[3]

Geographic Variation

Rural AL is the primary geographic location at risk for this outcome, and rurality is addressed under various health measures throughout SHA.

Topics Addressed for This Indicator are:

- Percent of Alabamians with no healthcare coverage.
- Rural healthcare facilities.
- Households without a vehicle.
- Primary care HPSAs.

Highlights

Data are retrieved from the Rural Health Information Hub, the ADPH Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, and BRFSS:

- In 2019, a higher percentage of AL's population was uninsured than the U.S. (17.5 percent compared to 13.6 percent).
- Alabamians between 18-24 years old have the highest percentage of the uninsured population at 24.3 percent.

Risk Factors:

- Income level.
- Job stability/unemployment.
- Health insurance coverage.
- Geography/rural residents.
- Perceived discrimination from providers.
- Access to reliable information.

Percent of Alabamians with no Healthcare Coverage

While healthcare coverage does not directly correlate to access to care, it poses a barrier to receiving early and preventive care:[3]

- AL had a higher percentage of the uninsured population than the U.S. (17.5 percent compared to 13.6 percent) in 2019.
- The Southeastern Public Health District had the highest percentage of the uninsured population.
- Males have a higher uninsured prevalence compared to females (18.9 percent and 16.3 percent, respectively).
- AA/black adults have higher uninsured prevalence healthcare coverage than white adults (18.7 percent and 15.1 percent, respectively).
- Alabamians between 18-24 years old have the highest percentage of the uninsured population at 24.3 percent. After 65 years old, most individuals are covered by Medicare or private insurance.

*In Table 2.1, rural and urban calculations were supplied by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Table 2.1 – Percentage of Alabamians Ages 1864 Years Old with no Healthcare Coverage, 2019		
	%	**95% CI**
AL	**17.5**	**(15.9-19.1)**
U.S.	**13.6**	**–**
Public Health Districts		
Northern	20.8	(16.3-25.2)
Northeastern	16.5	(12.7-20.2)
West Central	14.3	(10.4-18.1)
Jefferson	17.0	(13.1-20.8)
East Central	16.9	(12.3-21.5)
Southeastern	22.6	(17.2-28.0)
Southwestern	11.3	(8.1-14.5)
Mobile	18.0	(14.0-22.1)

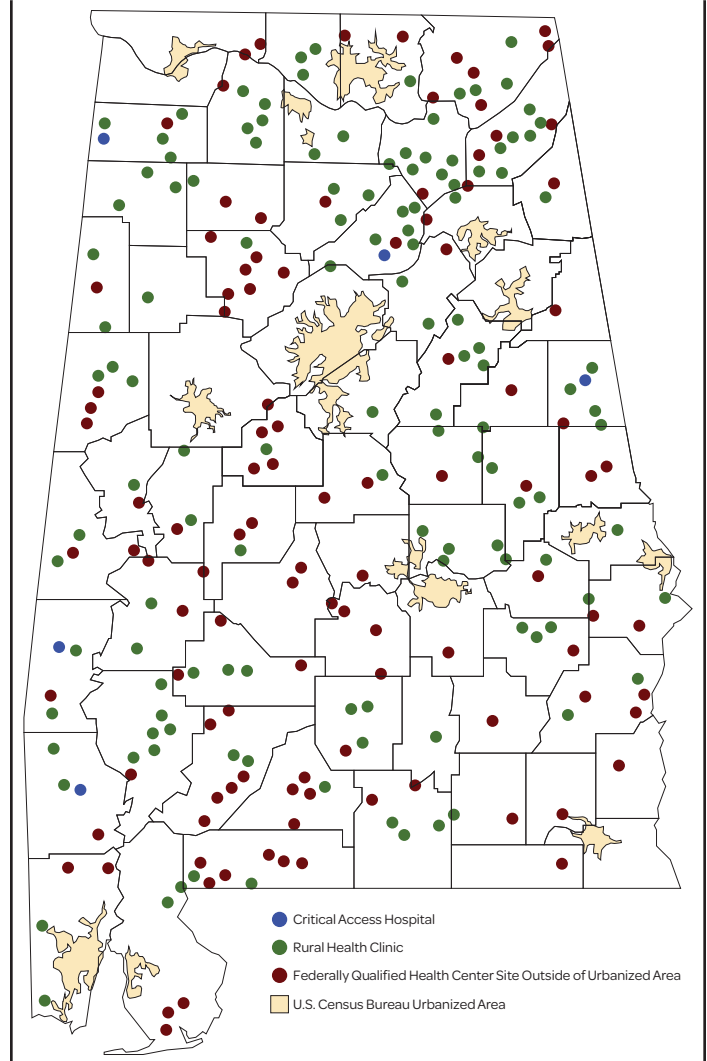| Geographic Variation *		
Rural	12.8	-
Urban	11.3	-
Sex		
Male	18.9	(16.4-21.3)
Female	16.3	(14.2-18.4)
Race/Ethnicity		
White	15.1	(13.3-16.8)
AA/black	18.7	(15.6-21.8)
Household Income		
Less than $15,000	29.1	(23.1-35.1)
$15,000-24,999	31.3	(26.1-36.4)
25,000-$34,999	19.3	(13.6-25.0)
$35,000-$49,999	13.8	(9.9-17.6)
$50,000+	6.7	(5.1-8.4)
Age (in years)		
18-24	24.3	(18.4-30.2)
25-34	19.9	(16.2-23.6)
35-44	20.7	(17.2-24.3)
45-54	13.7	(11.2-16.3)
55-64	10.8	(8.6-13.1)
Education		
N/A	-	-

Rural Healthcare Facilities

Rural and urban are defined at the county level since most data is not available at sub-county levels. The model used considers the three following widely accepted indicators that tend to describe accepted concepts of rural and urban areas:

1. Public education employment as a percentage of total non-agricultural employment.

2. Agricultural sales per square mile of land surface.

3. Population per square mile of land surface:

   - AL's geography is considered 96 percent rural.

   - Figure 2.1 shows AL's rural healthcare facilities as of October 2020. The graph includes critical access hospitals, rural health clinics, and FQHC sites.

   - In 2019, AL had 5 critical access hospitals, 117 rural health clinics, 105 FQHC sites, and 48 short-term hospitals located outside urbanized areas.

   - Some rural hospitals have faced financial challenges for staying open, such as low reimbursement rates, reduced patient volumes, and uncompensated care.[4]

   - The disparity of access to care can be seen in Medicaid enrollment data. The annual statewide Medicaid eligibility for both adults and children is

24.7 percent. In rural populations, the Medicaid eligibility is 48.1 percent.

Figure 2.1 – This map represents rural healthcare facilities in AL. Green circles are rural health clinics, blue circles are critical access hospitals, and red circles are FQHC sites outside of urban areas. The yellow patches are urban areas determined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Source: Rural Health Information Hub, 2019.

- Critical Access Hospital
- Rural Health Clinic
- Federally Qualified Health Center Site Outside of Urbanized Area
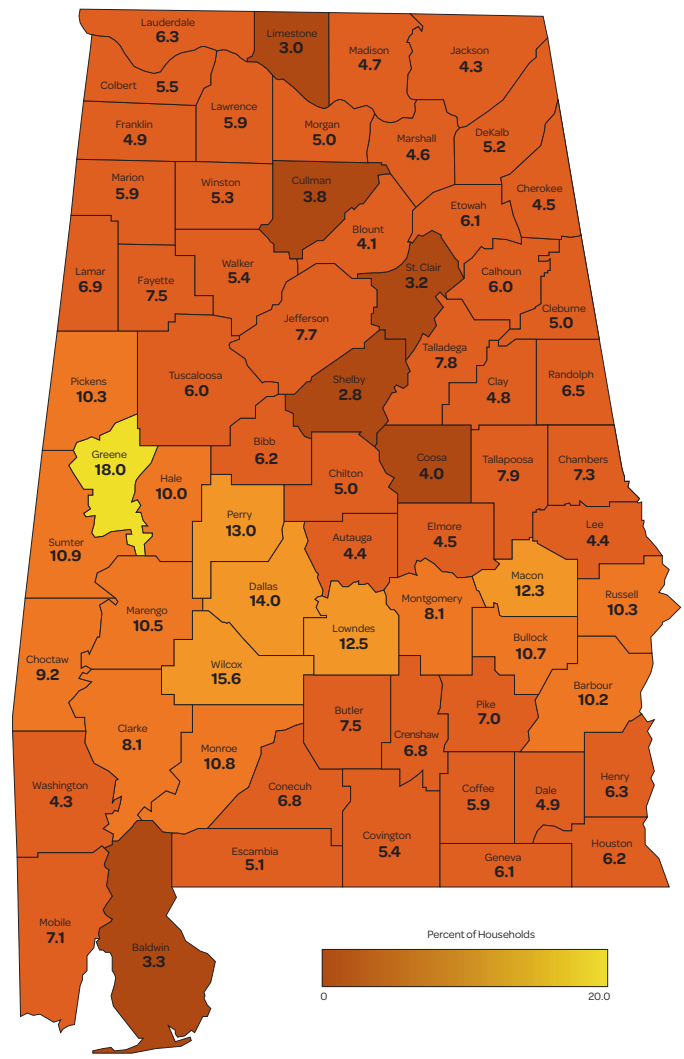- U.S. Census Bureau Urbanized Area

Households without a Vehicle

AL has very few public transportation options outside of urban centers. In 13 counties, there are no public transportation options as of March 2021:[5]

- Overall, 5.8 percent of rural households did not have access to a car compared to the 4.4 percent of urban households between 2015-2019.[7]

- The Southwestern Public Health District had the highest concentration of households without a vehicle.

- Greene County had the highest percent of households without a vehicle (18.0 percent) between 2015-2019. This area is covered by the West Alabama Public Transportation system.[7,8]

- The second highest area was Wilcox County, with an estimated 15.6 percent of households did not have a vehicle between years 20152019. In this area, there is a rural transportation program that offers services for dialysis patients, individuals who need handicap transportation, and low-income work employees.[7,8]

- Statewide, travel time to work was increasing for residents. In the previous CHA, 15.9 percent of commuters took more than 35 minutes to arrive to work. In 2019, 21.5 percent of commuters took over 35 minutes to get to work.[7]
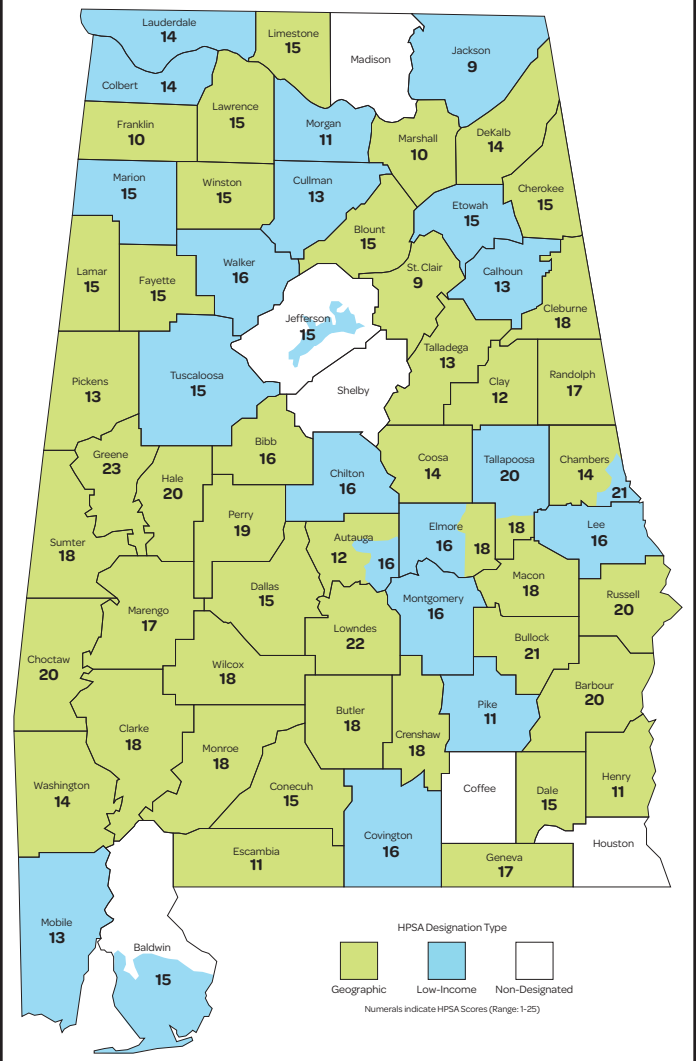
Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas

HPSAs represent a geographical service area with shortages of providers compared to the whole population. The HPSA score is calculated by using a federally determined algorithm. The higher scores indicate a demand for additional services.

Primary care health professionals include medical and osteopathic doctors practicing family medicine, general medicine, general pediatrics, general internal medicine, or general obstetrics and gynecological (OB-GYN) services.

In 2015, the Office of Telehealth began an initiative to set up additional capacity for telemedicine services. By 2018, the Office of Telehealth partnered with providers to successfully offer telemedicine to rural communities by increasing services in all county health departments.

Figure 2.2 – The percentage of households without vehicles is represented by county. Yellow counties indicate a higher proportion of households without vehicles. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 2.3 – This map represents the HPSA score, ranging from 1 to 25, for each county. Source: ADPH Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.

Data Sources

Table 2.1 – Percentage of Alabamians Ages 18-64 Years Old with no Healthcare Coverage, 2019. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimates: Quick Facts Table V2019, 2019 and CDC, BRFSS, 2019. Data requested March 2021.

Figure 2.1 – Selected Rural Healthcare Facilities in AL. USDHHS, Rural Health Information Hub., HPSA Survey 2011-2014. Data requested July 2020.

Figure 2.2 – Percentage of Households without a Vehicle, 2015-2019. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates Table DP04, 2019. Data requested March 2021.

Figure 2.3 – Primary Care HPSA, January 2019. ADPH, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, HPSA Survey 2011-2014. Data requested July 2020.

Written Sources

1. Healthy People 2030, Access to Healthcare, 2020.
2. CDC, Access to Care, 2021.
3. Rural Health Information Hub, Healthcare Access in Rural Communities.
4. Rural Health Information Hub, Rural Hospitals, 2020.
5. AL Transit, Directory of Transportation Providers, 2021.
6. Rural Health Information Hub, Transportation to Support Rural Healthcare, 2020.
7. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimates, 2019.
8. ALDOT, Rural Transportation Program, 2021.

Community Resources

AL Department of Economic and Community Affairs
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

ALSDE
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Department of Labor (ALDOL)
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Partnership for Telehealth
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Hospital Association
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Medicaid Agency's Non-Emergency Transportation Program
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: For-profit Organization

AL Office of Primary Care and Rural Health
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Primary Healthcare Association
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

AL Rural Health Association
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: Private Education Society

Connecting AL
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: Private Non-profit

State Health Planning and Development Agency
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: State Government Organization

Kid One Transport
Location: Montgomery County, AL
Type: Non-profit Organization