



# The Rural Services Network

# **National Rural Conference 2024**

Delivering for Rural – Unlocking rural prosperity



Thursday 19th September  
**Rural Health & Care Session**



# Rural Health and Care

The proportion of GP registered population that is over 75 years old is **markedly greater** for rural practices than urban.



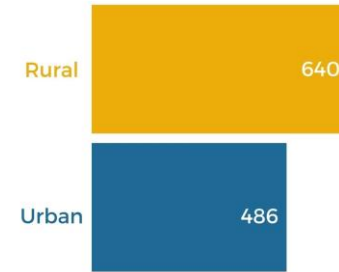
Source: Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, Fingertips, Public Health Data 2024

Rural Areas accounted for **59%** of hard to recruit training places for GP Speciality Trainees in 2023-2024.



Source: Homes England - Fact Sheet 10: New homes in Rural Areas, 2023/24

In 2021/2022, rural areas of England had a **higher rate** of people diagnosed with an invasive cancer (excluding non melanoma skin cancer) than in urban areas.



Source: Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, Fingertips, Public Health Data 2021/22

There is more pressure on NHS dentistry services in rural areas due to a higher ratio of residents to dentists.



Source: Defra analysis of NHS Dental Statistics for England, 2022/23

Commissioned NHS dental work delivered in March 2024.



Source: Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, Fingertips, Public Health Data 2024

Both in rural areas and urban, the proportion of patients waiting over 6 weeks for a diagnostic test is above the NHS target by a significant margin.



**The situation being worse in rural areas.**

Source: RSN analysis of Waiting Times and Activity for Diagnostic Tests and Procedures, 2024

## Everyone deserves access to adequate health and care services

- Rural residents face distinct healthcare challenges, including limited access to transport, longer distances to medical facilities, an aging demographic, housing inadequacies, digital connectivity gaps, and recruitment hurdles for healthcare workers.
- These factors collectively impede the delivery of equitable health and care services, a fundamental NHS principle. While the EFRA report highlights the neglect of rural needs in mental health policy, rural councils grapple with delivering social care amidst escalating costs and demand.
- The healthcare system confronts a critical dilemma: balancing the need for specialised, centralised services with the necessity for geographic accessibility. Innovations in community-based healthcare and digital health solutions offer promising avenues, yet their success hinges on robust network connectivity.
- Addressing mental wellbeing, particularly in isolated communities, and ensuring consistent care support through diverse networks, are pivotal for maintaining the health and independence of rural populations.

# Rural Health and Care

## First 18 months

Deliver a rural work force strategy to aid training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.

Protect rural communities now by accepting the recommendations of the May 2023 EFRA Committee report into rural mental health. Immediately action the recommendation to establish a “new joint rural health policy and delivery team to lead and improve on current “rural proofing” of health policy; and work with NHS England to set targets to measure and improve outcomes for rural mental health services and support rural health providers”.

Ensure strategy is Rural Proofed, especially proposals designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes including quality of housing, and access to good quality jobs and training. This must also take into account the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and ensure that they are accurately reflected in funding formulae.

## First 3 years

Address the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places.

Develop integrated services that provide holistic person-centered care

Create a culture which ensures the Third Sector is included as a partner in the integrated planning system and resourced accordingly, where it is cost effective to do so and in the community's interests. The contribution of community and voluntary organisations must not be underestimated, not least with respect to prevention and wellbeing.

# Rural Solutions