

Access to Information and Services

Rural Ontario is often characterised by small populations, geographically dispersed communities and long distances from major urban centers. Access to information and health, social and community services is an ever-present challenge for families living in these areas.⁴

Rural Reality: Families living in rural areas often lack access to the full range of services that are typically found in urban centers.⁵ Even access to basic services can present a challenge for rural residents.

Impact on Families:

- » To ensure their child's needs are met, families must often travel long distances for services outside of their community.
- » Families of children with special needs may feel pressure to move away from their home communities to live closer to specialized services.

Rural Reality: In rural areas, the travel distance to access services can be a significant barrier for families. Public transit is rare, and usually non-existent, in rural communities.⁶

Impact on Families:

- » Many families who own a vehicle, only own one. They may rely on friends and family to lend them a vehicle, or go without.
- » Travel costs, like fuel and repairs (which tend to be higher in rural areas), can pose a significant financial strain on families.
- » Families often drive long distances, sometimes on dangerous winter roads to access services. Injuries and death caused by motor vehicle collisions are more common in rural areas.⁷
- » The increased travel time also means that parents must take more time off work to get services, sometimes causing additional lost income.

Rural Reality: Health information can be more difficult to access in rural areas, in part due to the communication technology available.⁸

Impact on Families:

- » The means of communication that we have come to rely on and expect in towns and cities (e.g. high speed internet, consistent cell phone coverage, etc.) is not always available in rural areas. Many rural families experience challenges obtaining health information and communicating with service providers.

Rural communities are an important and vibrant part of Eastern Ontario.

In fact, 25% of us living in Eastern Ontario are living in rural areas.^{2/3} To make decisions that work for our communities, we must take into account rural Ontario's unique strengths and challenges.

Population Split in Eastern Ontario ¹	Rural	Urban
Hastings	63%	37%
Lanark	62%	38%
Leeds and Grenville	68%	32%
Lennox and Addington	100%	0%
Ottawa	4%	96%
Prescott and Russell	82%	18%
Prince Edward	83%	17%
Renfrew	70%	30%
Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry and Akwesasne	59%	41%

Things to consider...

- » What strategies are in place or being developed to ensure equitable access to information and services, regardless of where a child or family lives?
- » How are 'core services' being defined when new policies are developed?
- » How are your decisions improving the accessibility of services and information for families living in rural areas?
- » How will you ensure the *rural reality* is taken into account when priorities are discussed and decisions are made?

Find more resources at www.child-youth-health.net

REFERENCES:

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6 Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. (2012). *Study on Transit in Canada*. Available online.

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