MODULE 6: RURAL HEALTH LESSON 6.2

Access, Quality, & Cost

Obj. 6.2: Evaluate resources in terms of access, quality, and cost in order to promote health.

DO NOW

Use the following statistics to answer the questions below.

A National Rural Health Snapshot	Rural	Urban
Percentage of USA Population**	nearly 25%	75% +
Percentage of USA Physicians**	10%	90%
Num. of Specialists per 100,000 population**	40.1	134.1
Population aged 65 and older	18%	15%
Population below the poverty level	14%	11%
Average per capita income	$19K	$26K
Population who are non-Hispanic Whites	83%	69%
Adults who describe health status as fair/poor	28%	21%
Adolescents (Aged 12-17) who smoke	19%	11%
Male death rate per 100,000 (Ages 1-24)	80	60
Female death rate per 100,000 (Ages 1-24)	40	30
Population covered by private insurance	64%	69%
Population who are Medicare beneficiaries	23%	20%
Medicare beneficiaries without drug coverage	45%	31%

Statistics used with permission from "Eye on Health" by the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, from an article entitled "Rural Health Can Lead the Way," by former NRHA President, Tim Size; Executive Director of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative.

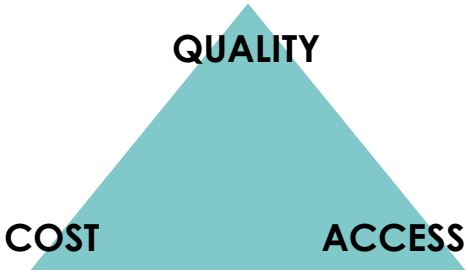
1. **Reflect:** Which of these statistics is most concerning, in your opinion? Why?

2. **Predict:** What other statistics that do not appear on this list do you think represent disparities in rural health?

3. Choose one statistic that you think best represents a problem with **cost**, one that represents a problem with **access**, and one that represents a problem with **quality** of healthcare. Write each words ("COST," "ACCESS," and "QUALITY") next to the statistic you choose.

NEW INFO

The "iron triangle" of healthcare is an observation about the relationship between cost, access, and quality. Wherever one aspect is improved, another is impacted negatively.



Let's use a fitness club as an example:

1. Imagine the owner of the fitness club wants to purchase brand-new, cutting edge weightlifting machines to replace its old, outdated ones (quality improves), but it will need to increase membership prices (costs increase) to pay for these expensive new machines.

2. Now the owner wants to acquire a greater number of treadmills because they are all occupied during peak hours. Buying more treadmills (access increases) causes membership fees to go up again (costs increase).

3. Alternatively, let's say that a wholesale fitness machine retailer offers the fitness club an opportunity to trade in 20 of it's current treadmills for a 40 of a more basic model at no cost. The basic treadmills would have less features (reduced quality), but more would be available for members (increased access).

In healthcare, the tradeoffs are not always as exact or easily measurable. But cost, access, and quality do act as competing interests in many situations. However, creative solutions can sometimes manage to cut costs, while improving quality and access.

THINK

Think about the last time you visited a health care professional. Consider your experience in terms of cost, access, and quality. Which of the three was most positive? Which was most negative in your experience? Explain.

Three Corners

Often legislators, public officials, policymakers, health care professionals and patients are forced to make decisions between cost, access, and quality. Let's go back to the fitness club example. Imagine you are in charge of improving the health of your community by getting people to exercise more. If no fitness club exists, or one exists that is a great distance for people to travel to, you may believe that **ACCESS** should improve. If a fitness club is nearby, but its membership costs are so great that few people can afford it, you may believe that **COST** should improve. If the fitness club is rundown and people do not feel comfortable or excited to use it, you may believe that **QUALITY** should improve. The table below summarizes some questions you may ask yourself about a resource like the fitness club.

COST	Should this resource be more **affordable** for people? Should more **funding** be devoted to this resource?
ACCESS	Do **more people** need access to this resource? Is this resource **absent or lacking** in the community? Does it need to become **easier for people to get to or use** this resource?
QUALITY	Is this resource **effective**? Is it working for people? Does this resource actually **do it's job**? Does it improve health?

For each of the following resources in your community health ecosystem, ask yourself: Which aspects need to improve most: **COST, ACCESS,** or **QUALITY**? You may believe that more than one of these factors should be improved; however, you must choose the one you believe is MOST in need. Place a checkmark in one box for each resource below.

Resource	COST	ACCESS	QUALITY
1. Healthy food			
2. Primary care *(ex: pediatricians, urgent care, etc.)*			
3. Substance abuse treatment			
4. Dentists (oral health care)			
5. Sexual health services (pregnancy, STIs)			
6. Mental health care			
7. Pharmacy			
8. Homeless shelters			
9. Health education			
10. Green spaces for outdoor recreation			
11.Specialty care *(ex: dermatologist, pain specialist)*			
12. Hospital			
13. Emergency response			

THINK

Three Corners *(cont.)*

Now, you will share your thinking by standing up and getting moving. Three corners of the classroom are labeled: **COST, ACCESS,** and **QUALITY**. When each resource is called, silently go to the corner of the room based on the factor you believe most needs to be improved. Be sure to report to the corner you initially checked, even if it's not the popular answer.

DISCUSS

Mini-Debate

1. *NOW GO TO THE CORNER THAT ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:*

   Which of the three (**COST, ACCESS,** and **QUALITY**) did you choose most often? (If you chose each of the three approximately equally, choose the one you think your community needs the most help with, overall.)

2. *TALK TO YOUR FELLOW CLASSMATES IN YOUR CORNER ABOUT WHY YOU CHOSE THAT FACTOR.*
3. *DEFEND YOUR CHOICE TO THE CLASS.*

ASSESS

You have been given $100,000 to spend on improving the health of your community in ONE way. Which resource is most needed in your community? You must choose only ONE of the resources listed in the previous activity (Ex: dentists). In the space below:

1. Explain WHICH resource you chose and WHY that resource is the most important for your community.
2. Explain at least one way that you would use the money to improve **QUALITY** of this resource, one way you would improve **ACCESS** to this resource, and one way you would improve **COST** so that it is financially realistic for people.

Prepare for Debate

Find a small group (2-4 total) who chose the same resource to prioritize. Prepare for a debate, where you will argue the the money should be spent to improve **COST, ACCESS,** and **QUALITY** for your chosen resource. To effectively convince others of your viewpoint, you will have to do some research. Begin with the questions below, but also gather any additional information you think would be helpful.

1) What DATA or EVIDENCE demonstrates that your chosen resources is a ***need, challenge, or disparity*** in rural health settings?

2) What is the ***current status*** of the resource in your community?

3) What could be improved with this resource in terms of ***cost, access, and quality***?

4) What might your opponents say to ***counter your arguments***? How would you ***refute*** these counterarguments?